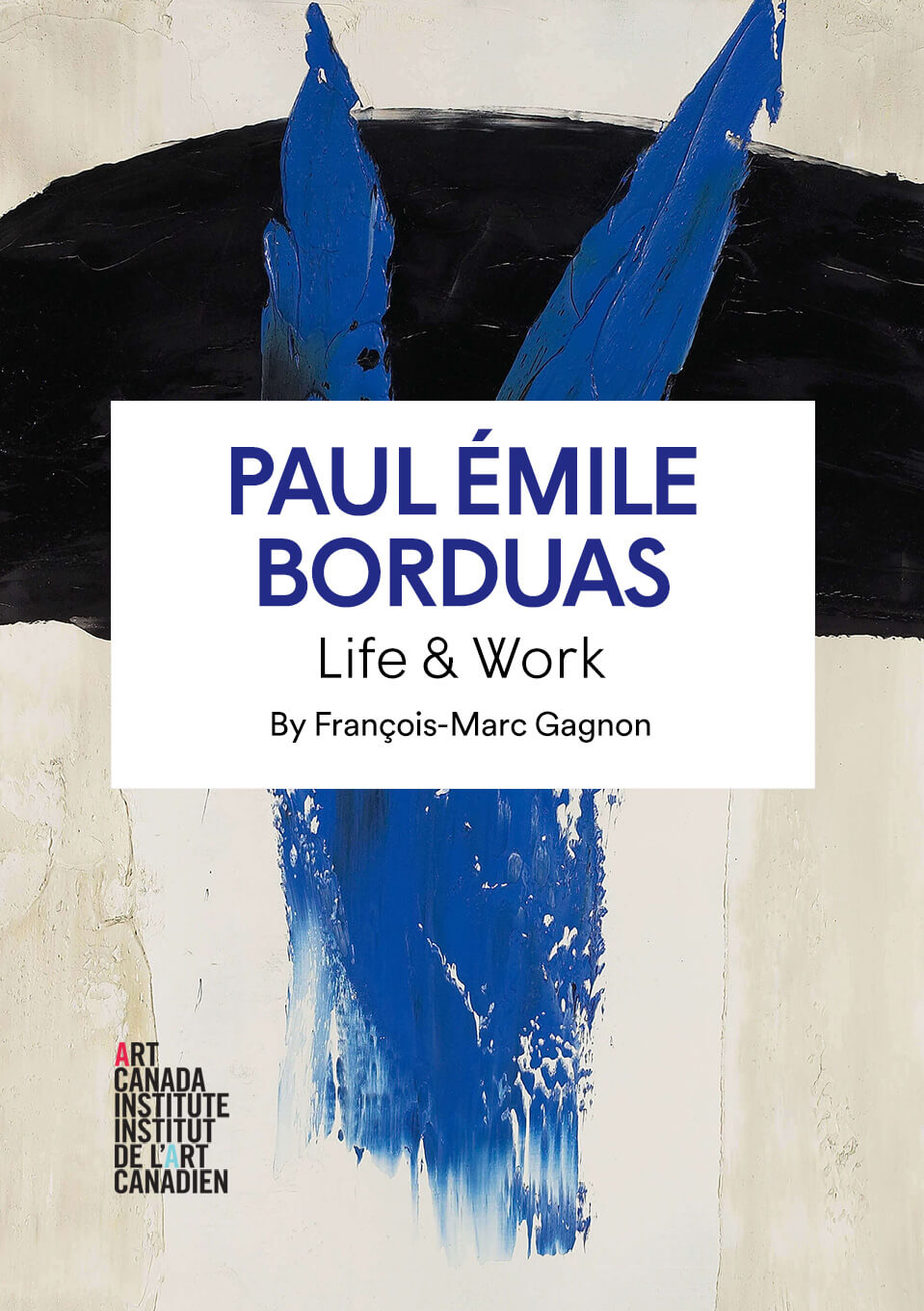


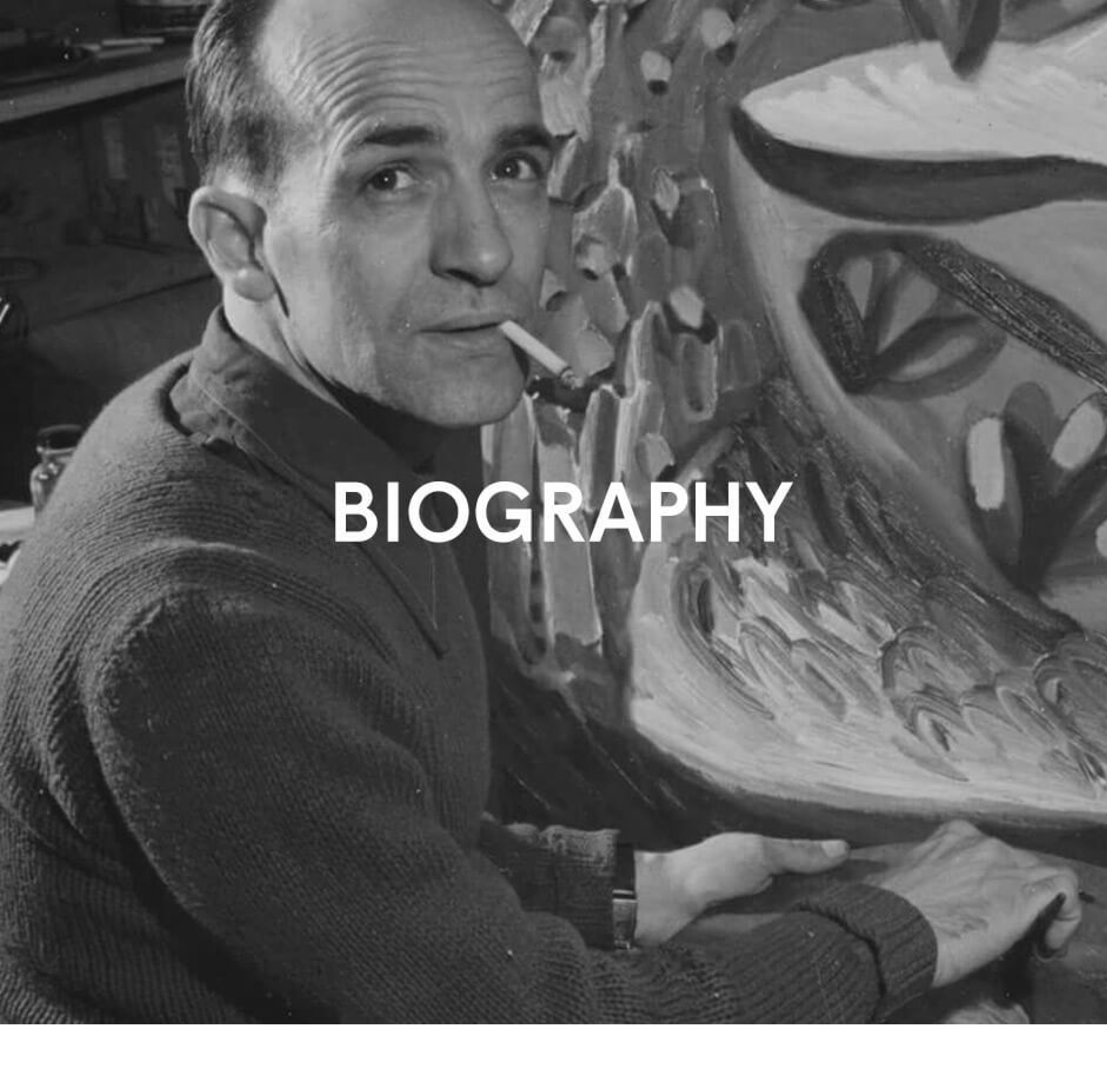
PAUL ÉMILE BORDUAS

Life & Work

By François-Marc Gagnon

ART CANADA INSTITUTE
INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

Contents



BIOGRAPHY

The leader of the avant-garde Automatiste movement and the principal author of the *Refus global* manifesto of 1948, Paul-Émile Borduas had a profound influence on the development of the arts and of thought, both in the province of Quebec and in Canada. Borduas was born in 1905 in the village of Saint-Hilaire, where he apprenticed with the painter Ozias Leduc before studying art in Montreal and in Paris. After the publication of *Refus global*, he lost his teaching position in Montreal and within a few years left Quebec for New York and then Paris. Borduas achieved some measure of international recognition in his final years in Paris, where he died in 1960.

EARLY EDUCATION

Paul-Émile Borduas was born in Saint-Hilaire, a village some forty kilometres east of Montreal, on November 1, 1905, the fourth of seven children. His father, Magloire Borduas, was a carpenter and blacksmith. His mother, Éva Perrault, was known in the village for the beauty of her garden.

As a boy Borduas suffered from poor health; he attended the village school for only five years and received some private tutoring. Borduas stated that his schooling ended at age twelve, around 1917, though this has not been confirmed. We do know that in 1921, when Borduas was sixteen, the painter Ozias Leduc (1864–1955), who also lived in Saint-Hilaire, took him on as an apprentice in church decoration. Leduc subsequently encouraged him to register at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal in 1923, the year after the school opened.

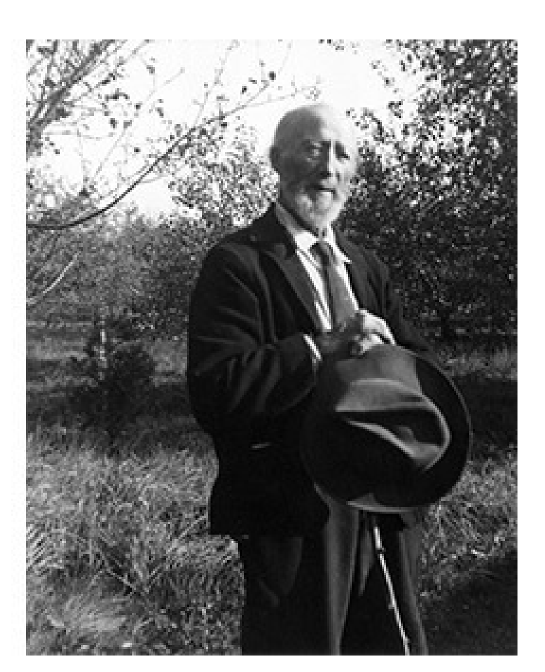




LEFT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Decorative Project for the Chapel of a Château, No. 1: Study for Choir Elevation*, 1927, gouache over graphite on wove paper, 20.2 x 12.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Decorative Project for the Chapel of a Château, No. 4: Study for Stained Glass Window*, 1927, gouache over graphite on wove paper, 23 x 7.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Borduas benefited from two distinct forms of training in the visual arts, owing to his apprenticeship with Leduc and his studies at the École des beaux-arts. He would retain fond memories of Leduc, but among his professors at the École only Robert Mahias (1890–1962) was singled out by him for cautious praise. Borduas quarrelled with Charles Maillard, an academic painter who despised modern art; Maillard had been appointed director of the school in 1925 after the departure of Emmanuel Fougerat. Borduas believed that Maillard damaged his reputation and hindered his progress for years to come. After graduating from the École des beaux-arts in 1927, Borduas for a brief time taught drawing in Montreal—until Charles Maillard arranged to have him replaced as drawing teacher at the École du Plateau.

Borduas then had the opportunity to train as a religious painter and church decorator in France. On Ozias Leduc's recommendation, he was funded by Olivier Maurault, parish priest of Montreal's Notre-Dame Church (now known as Notre-Dame Basilica), to study in 1928–29 and perhaps in 1930 at the Ateliers d'art sacré in Paris, under the direction of Maurice Denis (1870–1943) and Georges Desvallières (1861–1950).

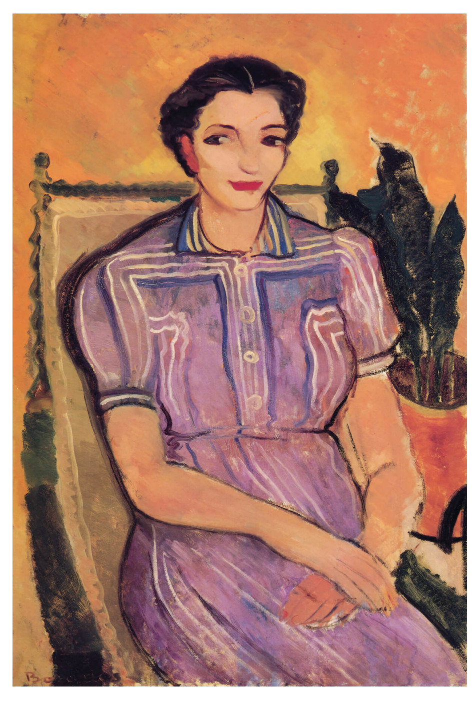



LEFT: The atelier of the École des beaux-arts, Montreal (c. 1924), where Borduas began his studies in 1923, a year after the school opened. RIGHT: Ozias Leduc at his home in Saint-Hilaire, 1954.

Although only passably academic, the lessons at the Ateliers allowed Borduas to meet the artist Pierre Dubois as well as the Dominican friar Marie-Alain Couturier, who sought to renew sacred art and architecture with modern styles and materials. Borduas worked with Dubois on church decoration projects in the Meuse region, where churches damaged in the First World War were being rebuilt. In Paris he had the opportunity to visit exhibitions of work by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), and Jules Pascin (1885–1930). Borduas would have extended his stay in France, but his funding was exhausted.

RETURN TO CANADA

Borduas returned to Canada on June 19, 1930. In the harsh economic climate of the Great Depression he was unable to secure independent contracts for church decoration. For a time he assisted Ozias Leduc, working on the Saints-Anges Church in Lachine. To make ends meet he taught drawing at primary schools and at the Collège André Grasset in Montreal.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Gabrielle Borduas*, 1940, oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Borduas painted this image of his wife five years after they were married.

On June 11, 1935, Borduas married Gabrielle Goyette, from Granby, the daughter of a doctor and a trained nurse herself. They had three children—Janine, Renée, and Paul. Until 1938 the family lived in a house near Lafontaine Park in Montreal, at 953 Napoleon Street.

In 1937 Borduas finally secured a position at the École du meuble, where Jean-Marie Gauvreau (1903–1970) was director. Most of Borduas's teaching career was spent at this school, which would prove to be a stimulating environment for him. His career reached a turning point in 1938 when he discovered Surrealism and the works of the French writer André Breton. Borduas was particularly influenced by some advice given by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) to his students, referred to in a text by Breton. Essentially, Borduas took from the lesson the idea of painting without having a preconceived idea—in a sense "automatically."

At the École du meuble Borduas met the architect Marcel Parizeau and the art historian and critic Maurice Gagnon, who was hired at the same time. Soon he would also become acquainted with a number of like-minded young artists and intellectuals who were keen to push the rigid boundaries of Quebec society. They included his students Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923–2002), Marcel Barbeau (b. 1925), and Roger Fauteux, and through them some students from the École des beaux-arts: Françoise Sullivan (b. 1923), Pierre Gauvreau (1922–2011), Fernand Leduc (1916–2014), and Maurice Perron (1924–1999).



In the early 1940s the Automatistes would meet in the studio of Fernand Leduc. *Left to right*: Marcel Barbeau, Madeleine Arbour, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Pierre Leroux, and Claude Gauvreau.

Borduas also met Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927–1991), then at the Collège Notre-Dame in Montreal, and later, Marcelle Ferron (1924–2001), after she left the École des beaux-arts in Quebec City. Under Borduas's leadership these artists formed the group that came to be known as the Automatistes, the future signatories of the manifesto *Refus global (total refusal).*

In the early 1940s the Automatistes met at Borduas's studio on Mentana Street or at Fernand Leduc's studio; these spaces offered the group members the freedom to broach any subject—political, religious, social, or artistic—and to discuss each other's opinions and ideas. They also participated in so-called forums—public debates on modern painting, non-representational work, and abstraction—held in schools in Montreal (Externat classique Sainte-Croix, Collège Saint-Laurent) or in nearby communities (Collège classique de Sainte-Thérèse). These forums were sometimes accompanied by exhibitions.

Borduas started to experiment with nonfigurative work, and his exhibition of gouaches in 1942 at the Ermitage, an exhibition hall owned by the Collège de Montréal, drew the attention of the critics. He continued to experiment in this direction, and the following year he exhibited abstract oil paintings at the Dominion Gallery in Montreal.

AUTOMATISTE EXHIBITIONS

The Automatistes were eager to mount public exhibitions of their recent work, which was nonfigurative and abstract. Since no commercial gallery would agree to exhibit all the members of the group, even with Borduas's endorsement, they exhibited in makeshift venues: in 1946 on Amherst Street, in Montreal's east end, in a hall where Julienne Saint-Mars-Gauvreau—the mother of Pierre Gauvreau and Claude Gauvreau, a playwright and poet—had organized gatherings for soldiers during the war; then in early 1947 at the home of Mme Gauvreau, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West.[1] In the summer of 1947, when Fernand Leduc and Jean-Paul Riopelle organized an exhibition at a new gallery in Paris, the Galerie du Luxembourg, the group seized the opportunity to show their work in France.



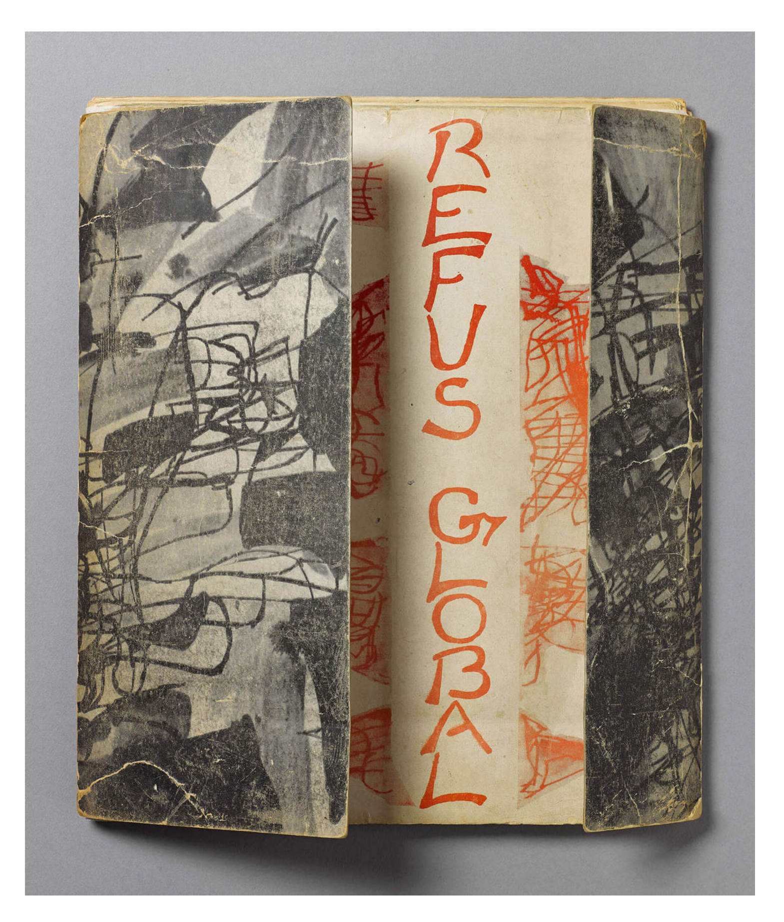
The first Automatiste exhibition, in a makeshift gallery at 1257 Amherst Street in Montreal, ran April 20–29, 1946.



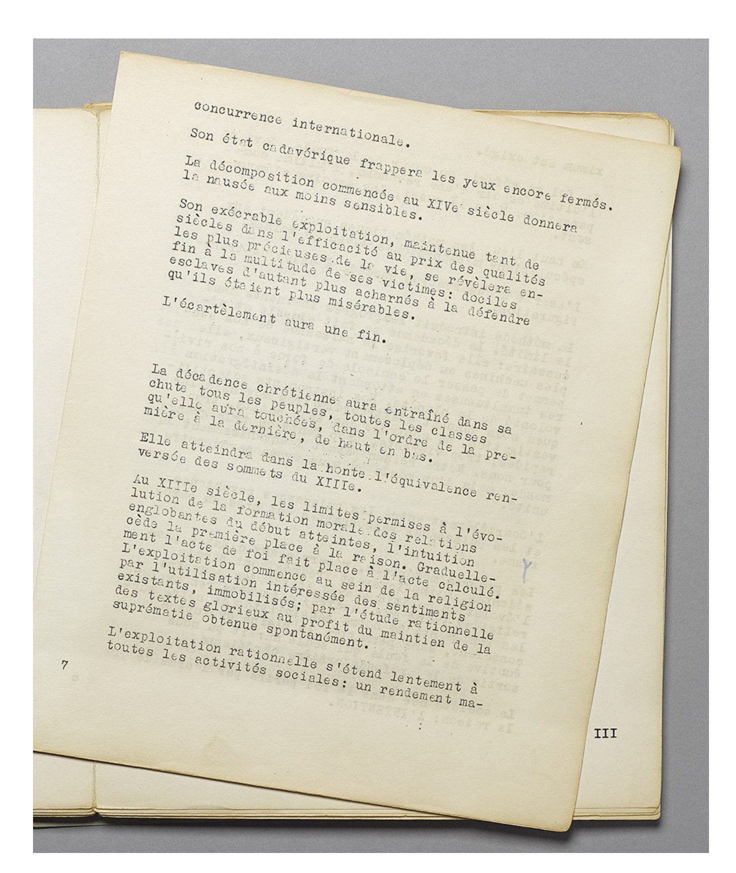
Jean-Paul Riopelle and Fernand Leduc at the exhibition *Automatisme* at the Galerie de Luxembourg, Paris, 1947.

REFUS GLOBAL

Determined to make their mark, and encouraged by Riopelle on his return from Paris where he had signed the Surrealist manifesto *Rupture inaugurale*, the Automatistes initially decided that their next exhibition in Montreal would be accompanied by a manifesto. Borduas took on the task of writing the main text, but Bruno Cormier and Françoise Sullivan, as well as Claude Gauvreau and Fernand Leduc, also contributed. The publication included reproductions of paintings by members of the group and photographs of Claude Gauvreau's theatre productions. In the end the group postponed the third Montreal exhibition of the Automatistes in favour of making an event out of the launch of the manifesto. *Refus global* was published in a first edition of four hundred copies printed on a Gestetner duplicating machine; the copies went on sale at the Librairie Tranquille in Montreal on August 9, 1948.



Refus global, first published in an edition of four hundred copies, went on sale at Montreal's Librairie Tranquille on August 9, 1948.


concurrence internationale.

Son état cadavérique frappera les yeux encore fermés.

La décomposition commencée au XIVe siècle donnera la nausée aux moins sensibles.

Son exécrable exploitation, maintenue tant de siècles dans l'efficacité au prix des qualités les plus précieuses de la vie, se révèlera enfin à la multitude de ses victimes: dociles esclaves d'autant plus acharnés à la défendre qu'ils étaient plus misérables.

L'écartèlement aura une fin.

La décadence chrétienne aura entraîné dans sa chute tous les peuples, toutes les classes qu'elle aura touchées, dans l'ordre de la première à la dernière, de haut en bas.

Elle atteindra dans la honte l'équivalence renversée des sommets du XIIIe.

Au XIIIe siècle, les limites permises à l'évolution de la formation morale des relations englobantes du début atteintes, l'intuition cède la première place à la raison. Graduellement l'acte de foi fait place à l'acte calculé. L'exploitation commence au sein de la religion par l'utilisation intéressée des sentiments existants, immobilisés; par l'étude rationnelle des textes glorieux au profit du maintien de la suprématie obtenue spontanément.

L'exploitation rationnelle s'étend lentement à toutes les activités sociales: un rendement ma-

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III

An interior page of *Refus global*, 1948. The work was hand-printed on a Gestetner duplicating machine.

In this manifesto Borduas launched a frontal attack on the parochialism (*esprit de clocher*, as it was called) in Quebec, the stifling dominance of Catholicism, and the narrow nationalism of the provincial government under Premier Maurice Duplessis. The immediate consequence was Borduas's suspension without pay from his position at the École du meuble, effective September 4, 1948. The provincial minister of youth and social welfare explained the decision as follows: "Because the writings and the manifestos [*sic*] he publishes, as well as his state of mind, are not conducive to the kind of teaching we wish to provide for our students."[2]

The repercussions of the manifesto's publication extended far beyond Borduas's career. His young (and not so young) disciples were also affected. Some, like Riopelle and Leduc and their respective partners, chose to leave Quebec for a life in France. Marcelle Ferron would later follow the same path. But others, those known as the "young brothers"—Marcel Barbeau, Jean-Paul Mousseau, and Claude Gauvreau—became even more interested in the political cause. Responding to the manifesto's exhortation to "refuse to be confined to the barracks of plastic arts," they sought to take their art and their ideas into the public domain, publishing polemics in journals and newspapers. Concerned that they were operating under an illusion with regard to the impact they could have on prevailing sensibilities, in 1950 Borduas wrote his essay "Communication intime à mes chers amis" (Intimate message to my dear friends), in which he recalls: "Poetical work carries a profound social potential, but [it] is realized slowly—for it has to be assimilated by a multitude of men and women with nothing to assist them but the power of the work itself."[3]


After losing his position at the École du meuble in Montreal, Borduas taught drawing to children in Saint-Hilaire. The interior of Borduas's home, showing artwork by his young pupils.

Borduas found himself without work or reliable resources in Quebec. He supported himself through his art (watercolours, small-scale paintings, and sculptures), supplemented by teaching drawing to the children of Saint-Hilaire. This situation began to weigh on his family and, upon his return from a trip to Toronto in October 1951, Borduas found an empty home. Gabrielle had left and taken their children with her.

IN NEW YORK

Desiring above all to leave Quebec, Borduas was left with no choice but to sell his home in Saint-Hilaire and pursue his goal of emigrating to the United States. New York was his destination, but first, in the summer of 1953, he rented a studio by the sea in the artists' colony in Provincetown on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Here he may have encountered the painter Hans Hofmann (1880–1966), who held summer workshops in the town. Hofmann had spent several years in Paris before moving to the United States, and so Borduas, whose English was then rudimentary, could have conversed with him in French. However, this encounter remains entirely conjectural.

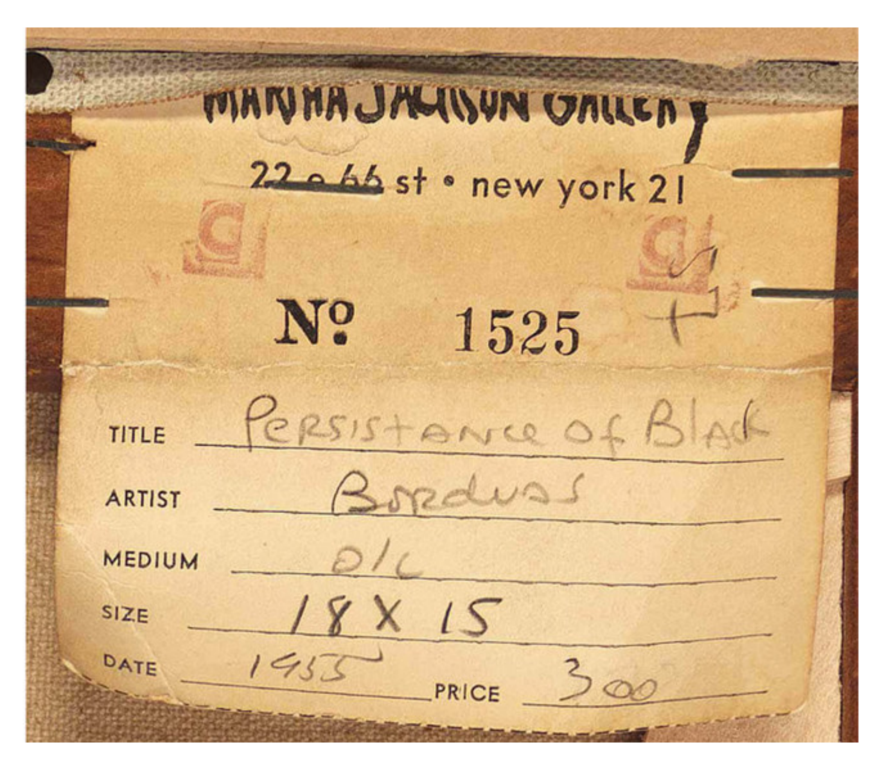
In New York Borduas moved into 119 17th Street East in Greenwich Village. He describes it in a letter to his former teacher Ozias Leduc: "Here, I've found a superb studio—the only one available, apparently—immense, flooded with light, all white. Naturally the rent is insane."[4] The collection of exhibition catalogues discovered among his belongings at the time of his death would imply that Borduas had attended art shows and visited museums while in New York, but Sam Abramovitch, an independent scholar and friend of the Automatistes, has stated that Borduas "rarely went out," and that the catalogues were those that he had given to the artist.[5]



Students gather for a demonstration in Hans Hofmann's studio in Provincetown, Massachusetts, date unknown.

Borduas immediately began to work toward a first exhibition in New York. On October 13, 1953, roughly two weeks after his arrival, he attended an opening at the Passedoit Gallery, at 121 57th Street East, where he hoped to exhibit. He must have been roundly bored: featured were pseudo-Cubist paintings by a Stefano Cusumano, whom no one knew. In any event, Georgette Passedoit soon extended an offer to exhibit in her gallery. On November 16 Borduas was able to inform the critic Guy Viau that "all is decided and signed: opening of my exhibition on January 5."[6] By 1955 Borduas wished to be represented in New York in a more dynamic venue than the Passedoit Gallery. He approached the Martha Jackson Gallery, then located at 22 East 66th Street.[7]





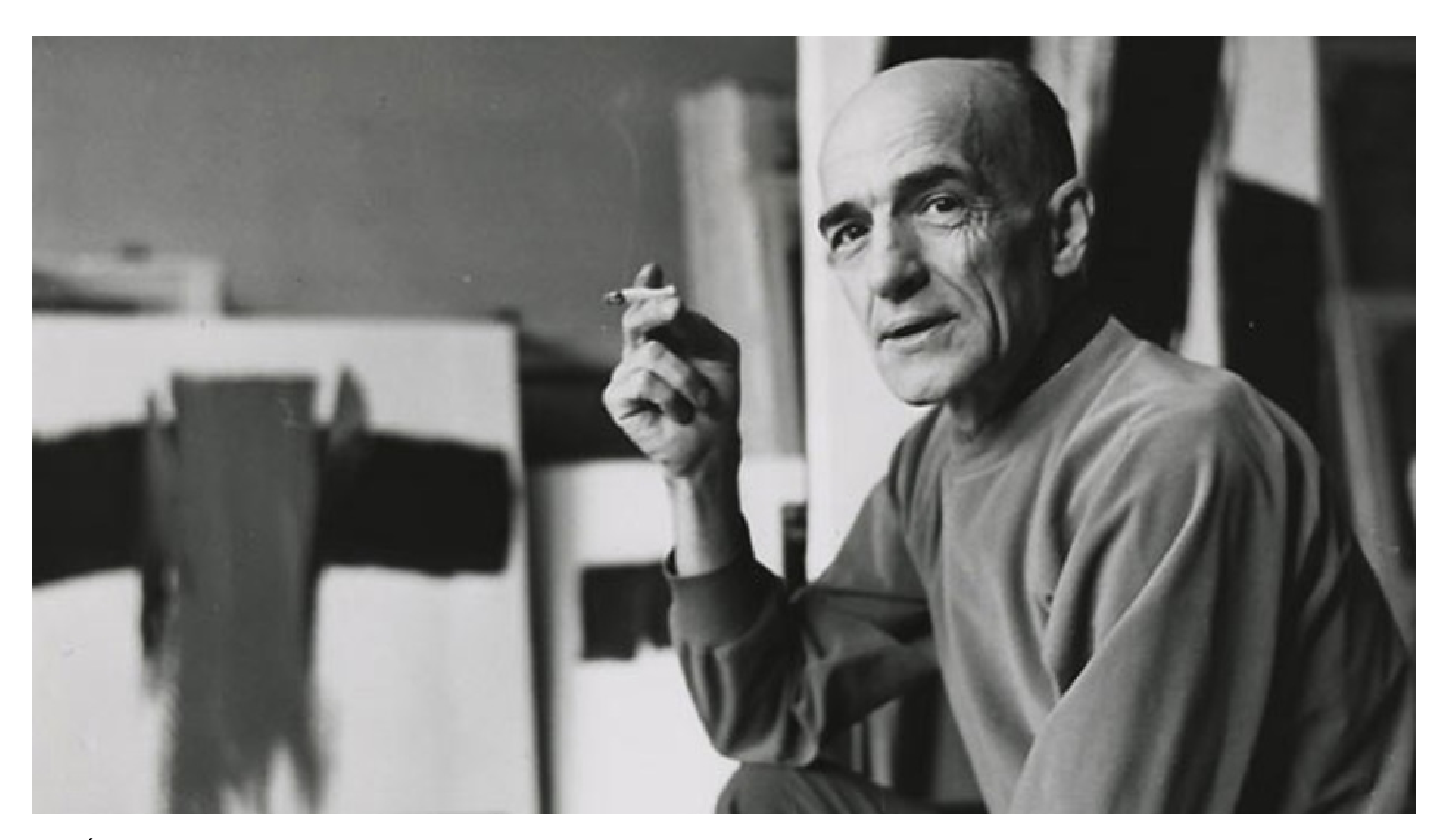
LEFT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Persistence of Blacks (Persistence des noirs)*, 1955, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 38.1 cm, private collection. This work was exhibited and sold by Borduas's New York dealer Martha Jackson. RIGHT: A label on the verso of *Persistence of Blacks* from the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, where it was consigned in 1957 after being shown at the Bienal de São Paulo and at the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

The Martha Jackson Gallery was not yet well known, having opened just the year before. In 1954, a year prior to Borduas's connection with the gallery, Martha Jackson had visited Europe, signing contracts with Karel Appel (1921–2006), Sam Francis (1923–1994), and John Hultberg (1922–2005). Shortly after Borduas joined the gallery, Jackson organized a successful exhibition of the work of Willem de Kooning (1904–1997). Borduas's papers include a short note dated September 20, 1955, in which he declares that he left four paintings on consignment at the Martha Jackson Gallery. It was a good move. Martha Jackson was interested in his work and would continue to represent him, even after he left New York.

IN PARIS

Despite what appeared to be an excellent start for Borduas on the New York scene, he left the city for Paris, boarding the *Liberté* on September 21, 1955, accompanied by his daughter Janine. He told his friend Gilles Corbeil that "this departure for Paris may well be the high point of the adventure." Knowing how things would turn out, it is impossible not to be touched by sadness at all this hope and optimism.

Martha Jackson had tried to put him in touch with critics in Paris, in particular Michel Tapié de Céleyran, who coined the term *art autre* (other art)—a poorly defined expression since it included both figurative artists, such as Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), Jean Fautrier (1898–1964), and Willem de Kooning, and abstract painters like Wols (1913–1951), Hans Hartung (1904–1989), and Serge Poliakoff (1906–1969).[8] It was Jackson who introduced him to the gallery Arthur Tooth & Sons in London and to "two German dealers," a reference to the Galerie Alfred Schmela in Düsseldorf—two contacts that were encouraging, especially the former. Jackson visited Borduas's studio in Paris to stock up on recent paintings and continued to exhibit his work in her gallery in New York.

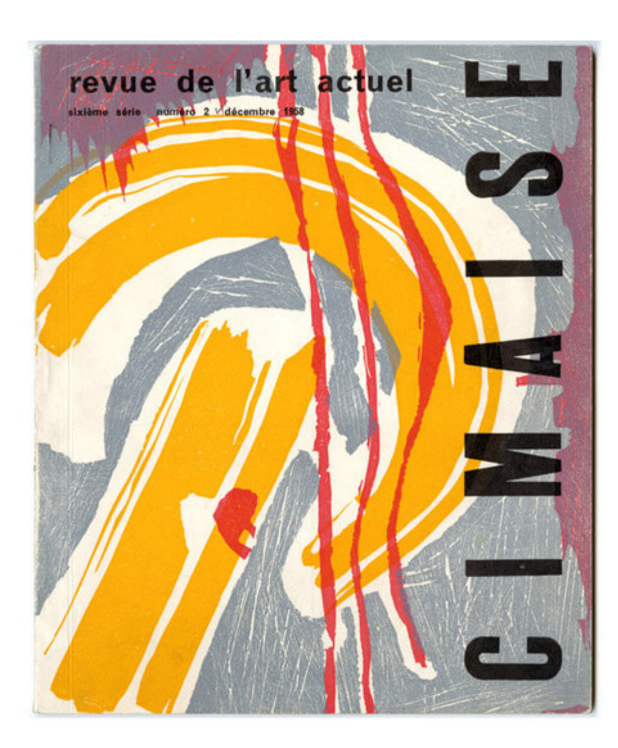


Paul-Émile Borduas in Paris, c. 1955.

His Paris period, however, from 1955 to 1960, was a difficult time for him. He failed to secure a solo exhibition until 1959, at the Galerie Saint-Germain, one year before his death. Still, throughout this period he managed to maintain his contacts with Canadian galleries (Max Stern of the Dominion Gallery in Montreal, and the Blair Laing Gallery in Toronto) and collectors (Gisèle and Gérard Lortie, Gilles and Maurice Corbeil, Gérard Beaulieu, and others). And he was included in prestigious exhibitions in Europe and North America as a representative of Canadian art. Nevertheless, he never achieved a breakthrough on the Parisian gallery scene, nor any meaningful recognition of his importance as a painter—certainly nothing in comparison to Riopelle, who would remain the most acclaimed Canadian painter during this time.

After Borduas's daughter Janine, who suffered from a mental illness, returned to Montreal, he lived alone in Paris. His precarious resources, failing health, and small circle of Canadian friends convey an impression of difficult circumstances. The exhibitions he attended were either avant-garde events featuring artists such as Georges Mathieu (1921–2012), Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), or Alberto Burri (1915–1995), or performances at the edge of art, like those of Yves Klein (1928–1962), creator of the *Symphonie monocorde* and of paintings executed by using nude models as "brushes."

Thanks to some sales of his work to collectors or to Canadian dealers who dropped into his studio, Borduas was able to purchase a Citroën, which he named La veuve joyeuse (The merry widow). The car allowed him to take a break from his work in Paris and travel to Switzerland, Italy, and Greece.





LEFT: The December 1958 issue of the Parisian art journal *Cimaise*, founded by the art historian and Borduas supporter Herta Wescher, which featured Borduas's painting *Composition 37*, 1958. RIGHT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Forgotten Forms (Formes oubliées)*, 1958, oil on linen, 49.5 x 51 cm, Ottawa Art Gallery. This work was painted when Borduas lived in Paris.

Borduas was one of the participants in *Spontanéité et réflexion*, an exhibition in Paris organized by the art historian Herta Wescher, who had co-founded the Parisian art journal *Cimaise* in 1953. Marcelle Ferron also participated, as did Max Weber (1881–1961), K.R.H. Sonderborg (1923–2008), Esther Hess (b. 1919), Joseph Zaritsky (1891–1985), and Don Fink (b. 1923). The exhibition was held at the Galerie Arnaud, from March 5 to 31, 1959. Borduas showed three canvases, including *Composition 37*, 1958, which was reproduced in *Cimaise*. His participation received special mention by Pierre Restany, an influential critic who, together with Yves Klein, would become a supporter of Nouveau réalisme (New Realism), an art movement founded the following year and represented by Arman (1928–2005), Martial Raysse (b. 1936), Daniel Spoerri (b. 1930), Jean Tinguely (1925–1991), César (1921–1998), and others. Restany writes of the exhibition: "Borduas dominates the group with his remarkable harmonic constructions based on broad, squared-off strokes integrated into a space of subtle whiteness enlivened with chromatic resonances."[9]

This was the first major recognition of his work in Paris. Two months later Borduas had his first solo exhibition in the city, from May 20 to June 30, 1959, at the Galerie Saint-Germain. A small art rental gallery in the same neighbourhood as the Galerie Arnaud, the Galerie Saint-German had just opened its doors to the public, though would not last long. The precise line-up of the seventeen works by Borduas on display is unknown, with the exception of one painting, *Abstract in Blue (Abstraction en bleu)*, 1959, which was reproduced on the invitation.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Abstract in Blue*, 1959, oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73.4 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This painting was reproduced on the invitation to Borduas's first solo exhibition in Paris, in 1959, at the Galerie Saint-Germain.

Abstract in Blue is a remarkable work, reflecting Borduas's growing interest in a kind of calligraphy composed of abstract signs. Should we read this as a reflection of his oft-expressed desire to visit Japan? But it goes without saying that Borduas's language is not a language of signs. The canvas consists

essentially of two movements: one horizontal, in the black; and one vertical, in the blue, splitting into two branches. The result is a sense of authority in the gesture and in the necessity of the shape.

Borduas died of a heart attack, alone in his studio on the rue Rousselet on February 22, 1960. His easel held a canvas that was nearly all black. *Composition 69* is considered his last painting. Borduas worked until the very end.



KEY WORKS

These fifteen works are representative of Borduas's entire production. The history of each work—often as significant as the style—also serves as a pretext for commentary on a broader scale, reflecting upon the period to which the work belongs and upon Borduas's work as a whole.

STUDY OF A SPARROW HAWK IN A DECORATIVE LANDSCAPE 1923–24



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape (Étude d'un épervier dans un paysage ornemental)*, c. 1923–24
oil and pastel, 90 x 60 cm
private collection

This painting features prominently in a photograph from around 1924 of a young Borduas, palette in hand, seated in his room at the convent of Saints-Noms-de-Jésus-et-de-Marie in Hochelaga (a district of Montreal, on the eastern half of the island), where he boarded during his studies at the École des beaux-arts. Just to the right of the easel is a drawing of the exterior of the convent,[1] and on the walls behind him drawings of plants or flowers are visible.



Borduas in his bedroom at the convent of Saints-Noms-de-Jésus-et-de-Marie, with *Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape*, around 1924.

The school had several stuffed animals that served as models, including the sparrow hawk used by Borduas in a decorative arts class taught by Professor Robert Mahias (1890–1962). *Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape* is typical of the exercises that first-year students were assigned at the École des beaux-arts. The school's aim was to train not only painters and sculptors but also skilled decorators who would find employment in the field of applied arts.

This dual orientation of fine and applied arts was defended and reaffirmed by the school's first directors, Emmanuel Fougerat and Charles Maillard. Ultimately it would become a source of conflict with Montreal's École du meuble, which, as its name suggests, was devoted entirely to the applied arts.

STILL LIFE: PINEAPPLES AND PEARS 1941

Paul-Émile Borduas, *Still Life: Pineapples and Pears (Nature morte. Ananas et poires)*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 49.9 x 60 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

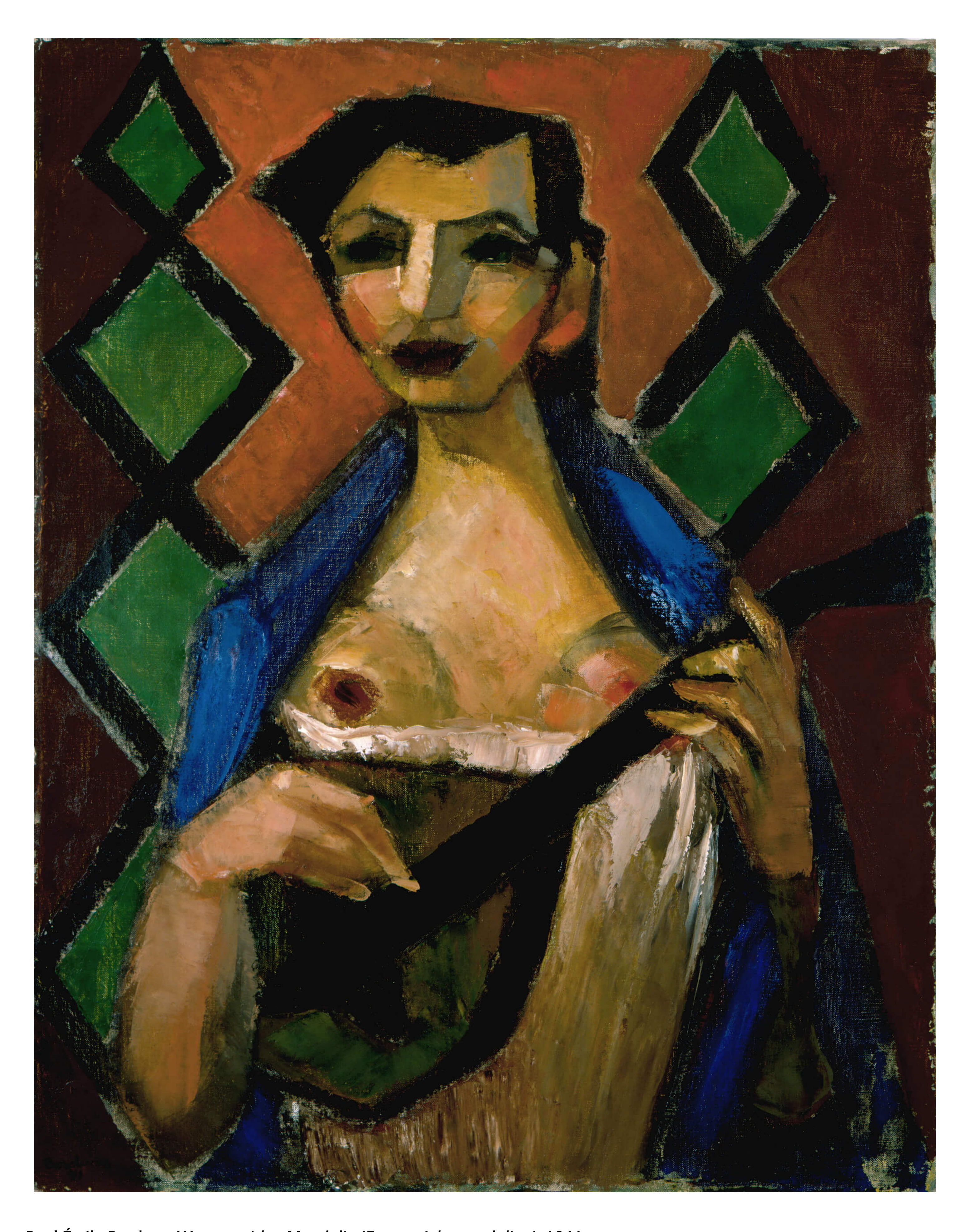
The still life occupies an important place in Borduas's early work, reflecting the influence of his first teacher, Ozias Leduc (1864–1955), who often worked in this genre and occasionally used the *trompe l'oeil* technique. Here Borduas takes a pineapple, a pear, and grapes as subjects for his still life, differentiating himself from Leduc by including the exotic pineapple. Leduc painted apples and onions, as well as objects familiar to local farmers, such as candlesticks, or even books or a violin—but never anything exotic. Also, there is not even a remote hint of *trompe l'oeil* in Borduas's painting. The table on which the fruit is arranged is set at a pronounced angle within the image plane and reveals the influence of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906).



Ozias Leduc, *The Three Apples*, 1887, oil on heavy cardboard, 22.7 x 31.7 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The black outline with which he surrounds the objects in his composition possibly reflects the influence of Georges Rouault (1871–1958), whose work Borduas grew to admire during his early days in Paris. Often considered a lesser genre, the still life provides an ideal framework for formal explorations of volume, contour, and composition. It is not surprising that still life was a favoured genre among the Cubists.

WOMAN WITH A MANDOLIN 1941



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Woman with a Mandolin (Femme à la mandoline)*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 65 cm
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

The subject of *Woman with a Mandolin* can easily be traced back to the Cubists. They, in turn, borrowed it from Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875) but transformed it with the rigour of analytical Cubism. A version by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, 1910, renders the subject in monochrome, with pictorial planes blending and collapsing, combining abstract frontal and profile views. Borduas's painting does not go quite as far. He poses his wife, Gabrielle Borduas, and—by exposing her breasts—reveals the underlying erotic subject of the theme: a woman awaking to love by a man's caresses, just as a mandolin emits music when it is strummed.



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Girl with Mandolin*, 1860–65, oil on canvas, 51.4 x 40.3 cm, Saint Louis Art Museum.

Borduas's *Woman with a Mandolin* is a solidly constructed painting. The figure is placed in front of a ground featuring diamond shapes that set off the model's face; the face is coarsely painted with a palette knife, whereas the rest of the canvas seems to be painted with a brush. Borduas would return to the subject of the mandolin in 1942 with a gouache titled *No. 38 Mandolin*, which was part of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's private collection. In this later painting, however, only the musical instrument is represented, posed on the ground like a piece in a Cubist still life,[1] demonstrating that Borduas had come to terms with Cubism, perhaps influenced by a major exhibition of the work of Alfred Pellan (1906–1988) at the Art Association of Montreal held the previous year. Borduas had his own exhibition in 1942, *Oeuvres surréalistes de Paul-Émile Borduas*, at the Ermitage. Years later in an interview, Borduas discusses the show: "The exhibition of gouaches in 1942, which we had assumed to be Surrealist, was nothing but Cubist. It took [us] five years to recognize it."[2]

GREEN ABSTRACTION 1941



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Green Abstraction (Abstraction verte)*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 26 x 36 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

In 1956 Borduas described *Green Abstraction* as his "first totally non-preconceived painting" and "one of the forerunners of the Automatiste tempest already gathering on the horizon."[1] To him an Automatiste painting was not preconceived; it was not planned in advance, with a final result or goal to be achieved. As he said in a CBC radio interview in 1950: "Perfectly well-intentioned people have often… said to me: 'Monsieur Borduas, I really love your work, I love the colour. Only, I don't understand [it].' And then I'm obliged to answer them honestly: 'I don't understand any more than you do. Whatever it is you are searching for in the painting, I'm searching for it too. You are looking for the subject of this painting; I'm as much at a loss as you are.'"[2]

In other words, the artist has no intellectual preconception of the painting before starting the work, and even its unconscious meaning is elusive. Interpretation can begin only when the work is finished; it is sometimes signified in the title (though not in this case) or can be discovered through conversations about the work with friends and connoisseurs.

Although this work was purchased by the poet Rémi-Paul Forgues shortly after *Exhibition Borduas* at the Dominion Gallery in Montreal in 1943, Borduas took it back in 1946 (in exchange for two gouaches), and it was later included in the 1951 exhibition *Borduas and De Tonnancour*, at the Art Gallery of Ontario. We lose track of the canvas until May 1962, when its new owner, Marcelle Ferron (1924–2001), showed it at the exhibition *Borduas, Riopelle e la giovane pittura canadese* (Borduas, Riopelle and young Canadian painting), at the Galleria Levi in Milan. Subsequently Ferron offered the painting to a friend, Guy Tridès, who in turn offered it to Florence Loeb, daughter of the renowned Paris art dealer Pierre Loeb. Florence Loeb would keep the work until 1980, when the art historian Claudette Hould recognized the work in Loeb's home in France and persuaded her to repatriate it to Canada. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts acquired the work in 1980 for its permanent collection.

STUDY FOR TORSO OR NO. 14 1942



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Study for Torso* or *No. 14 (Étude de torse ou N°14)*, 1942
Gouache on paper, 57 x 41.8 cm
Private collection

This painting is a good example of an early Automatiste work: executed without preconception. Borduas did not say to himself, "I am going to paint a female torso"; he recognized the subject in an instant when the work was completed. This is one of forty-five gouaches shown at the Ermitage, an exhibition hall owned by the Collège de Montréal, at 3510 Côte-des-Neiges. No other exhibition space could be found for these works, then judged to be "surrealist" and very "abstract." For a long time they were titled simply "Abstraction" and numbered, though in Borduas's papers they were identified only by a number and (in some cases) by a literary title.

Today the gouaches are easy to understand, but they presented quite a challenge to two critics in 1942, Henri Girard and Charles Doyon, despite their receptiveness to "modern art." Photographs taken at the exhibition capture the critics standing in front of *Study for Torso* with Borduas. It was only after the artist's explanations that they understood the work. Borduas believed that the exhibition of multiple works by one artist was preferable to the limited impact offered by group exhibitions that show only a single work by each artist. He was quoted in *Canadian Art* magazine, recalling the experience of exhibiting the gouaches at the Ermitage:



Borduas explaining *Study for Torso* or *No. 14*, 1942, to Henri Girard and Charles Doyon at the opening of the exhibition at the Ermitage in April–May 1942.

> My own conviction dates from the following experience: in 1942 after having gladly let my friends see the series of gouaches "automatiques," I was forced to observe that, from the most cultivated European to the most ignorant Canadian, the same reactions occurred; the only difference apparent was one of tempo. From the first until the fourth or fifth gouache, my friends looked without seeing, without showing any sign of understanding, in the slightest, their plastic significance. This only began to change after the fifth or, according to the spectator concerned, after the tenth example of my work, but, for all of them, from then on until the end, the sense of communion became increasingly stronger. Although I was only painting by successive waves, I found after 1942 that each time I showed a new series of productions, evidence of the same kind of behaviour was forced upon me.[1]

Whereas some of the gouaches—for example, *Sewing Machine* or *No. 1 (La machine à coudre* ou *N°1)*, 1942—adopt the format of a still life, *Study for Torso* takes the form of a standing figure, if not a portrait: that is, the orientation of the composition (horizontal or vertical) reflects the formats Borduas employed earlier in his figurative works. The unconscious springs from the old consciousness! Perhaps it was one of these works that inspired Charles Doyon to suggest that Borduas's work went through an "undulatory period"[2] the term, however, did not take hold.

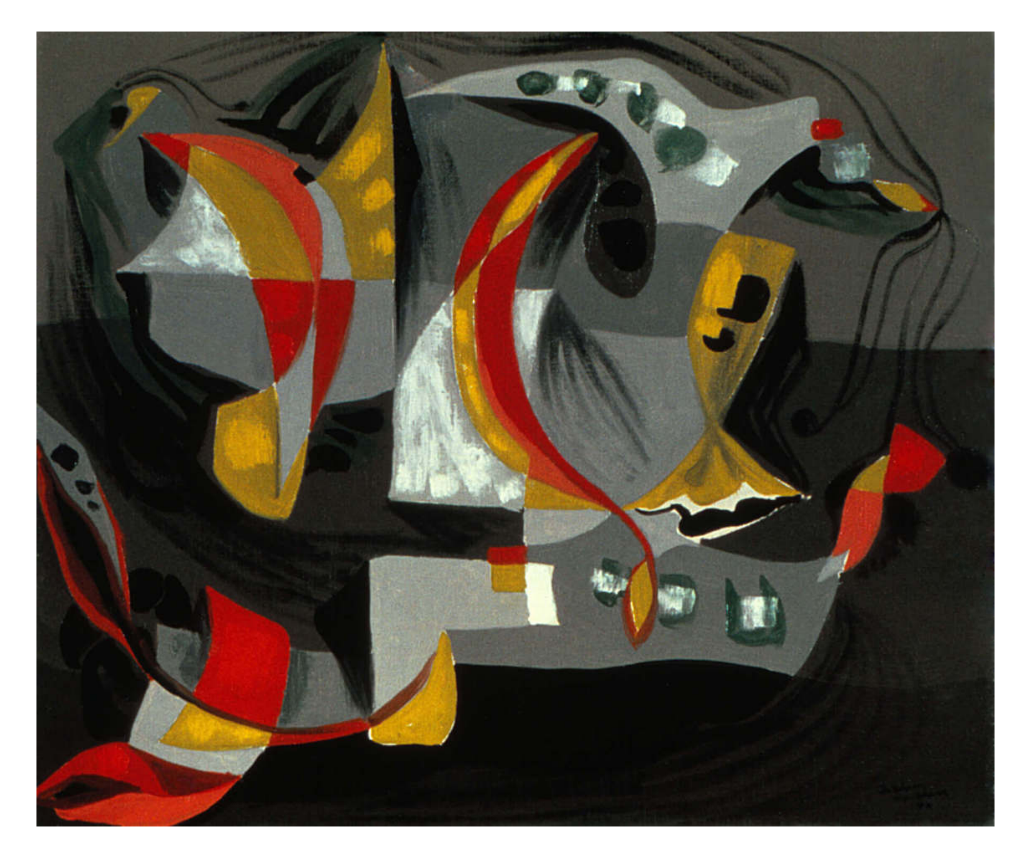
RAPE AT THE LIMITS OF MATTER 1943



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Rape at the Limits of Matter (Viol aux confins de la matière)*, 1943
Oil on canvas, 40.4 x 46.5 cm
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

In *Rape at the Limits of Matter*, Borduas moves in a new direction, using oil paint. In his works in gouache, such as *Study for Torso* or *No. 14*, 1942, Borduas had achieved a sense of spontaneity afforded by the medium. Could that spontaneity be transferred to oil painting? Would he be able to preserve the same tempo of improvisation? The same vivacity of colour and clean definition of planes? For the artist, problems arise primarily from differences in technique between oil painting and gouache. Compared to water, oil dries more slowly, and its surface tension is lower, meaning that it tends not to stay within the boundaries where it is applied. As such there is a risk that the lines will blur slightly. Simply transposing the gouaches into oil paintings quickly revealed itself to be difficult.

After some preliminary attempts, such as *The Phantom Boat (Le bateau fantasque)*, 1942, Borduas adopted a new approach. For the opposition of line and colour, which defined the gouaches, he substituted an opposition of ground—first applied by brush—and objects suspended in space painted onto this ground. *Rape at the Limits of Matter*, as the title suggests, can be seen as a whirl of galaxies against the background of a cosmic night. Borduas maintained this new approach throughout his true Automatiste period. The background colour becomes gradually more refined, at times suggestive of the ocean floor, or of morning or dusk.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Phantom Boat (Le bateau fantasque)*, 1942, oil on canvas, 48.2 x 58.4 cm, Université de Montréal.

The objects, initially painted with a brush, are applied with a palette knife. It could be said that Borduas, having exhausted the formula of still-life composition and portraiture in his gouaches, adopted the landscape formula in his oils between 1943 and 1949. This relationship to landscape is sometimes made explicit in the titles he gives to the finished canvases, such as *The Winged Courier of the Cliff (Le facteur ailé de la falaise)*, 1947; *Leeward of the Island* or *1.47 (Sous le vent de l'île* ou *1.47)*, 1947; and *Rock Drowned in Wine (Rocher noyé dans le vin)*, 1949.

LEEWARD OF THE ISLAND OR 1.47 1947



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island* or *1.47 (Sous le vent de l'île* ou *1.47)*, 1947
Oil on canvas, 114.7 x 147.7 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

For a long time this canvas was dated 1948, the year the manifesto *Refus global* was published. The correct date, 1947, was later established by Bernard Teyssèdre when he was a visiting professor in the Art History Department at the Université de Montréal. He identified the canvas in a group photo taken on the occasion of the second exhibition of the Automatistes, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West, held from February 15 to March 1, 1947.

This photo, in which Borduas is seated beneath his painting and surrounded by several of his young friends, communicates the importance of the canvas to the group. *Leeward of the Island* depicts an island seen from above whose shores are visible on the right. Green, red, white, and black elements appear above, as if suspended between sky and earth. The landscape format of the Automatiste oil paintings is reaffirmed in this work. The work was originally titled "Automatisme 1.47"; it was Bernard Teyssèdre who identified it as the same painting as *Leeward of the Island*.[1]



Bourduas seated beneath his iconic painting *Leeward of the Island*, surrounded by members of the Automatistes. *Left to right*: Claude Gauvreau, Madame Gauvreau-Saint-Mars, Pierre Gauvreau, Marcel Barbeau, Madeleine Arbour, Borduas, Mimi Lalonde, Bruno Cormier, and Jean-Paul Mousseau. Photograph by Maurice Perron.

Tancrède Marsil, then a student at the École des beaux-arts, published the article "Les Automatistes: École de Borduas" in *Le Quartier latin*,[2] in which he refers to *Leeward of the Island* as an Automatiste painting. It is the first time that the group is referred to as the Automatistes. *Leeward of the Island* can be considered their iconic painting, and it made Borduas a household name in Canada. It has been widely exhibited, in Canada (Toronto in 1960, Winnipeg in 1977), the United States (New York in 1957), and Europe (Brussels in 1958, Paris in 1971).

The "1.47" in the title most likely refers to the date of its creation, January 1947, or else it is a sequential number identifying it as the first canvas painted in 1947. From 1945 onward Borduas assigned dual titles to his paintings. For example, the artist's inventory contains the notation "131 – canvas sold M. Maurice Chartré – *8.47, Les carquois fleuris* [*Flowered Quivers*], 1947." The "131" corresponds to a system of simply numbering the canvases produced up to that date; "8.47" most likely represents the date it was painted: August 1947. In the case of *19.47* or *Nature's Parachutes* or *19.47 (Parachutes végétaux* ou *19.47)*, 1947, "19.47" implies the nineteenth canvas painted in 1947.

In Borduas's Automatiste paintings, objects more or less float—or are suspended, as in *Leeward of the Island*—in space above a background that extends outward (as in this case) or in depth. To emphasize the contrast, the ground is painted with a brush and the objects with a palette knife.

Notably, even when biomorphic forms are suggested, as they are here, the use of a palette knife enables Borduas to avoid the soft forms typical of the style of the Surrealist Salvador Dalí (1904–1989). Borduas always maintained a distance from what he called "dreamlike Surrealism."[3] He increasingly favoured the palette knife, which gave a "mineral" character to his images that explicitly resemble cliffs, the mountain faces at Saint-Hilaire, rocks, sea ice, or glaciers—features that are reflected in the titles of many of his paintings.

THE WEST WIND BRINGS PORCELAIN CHINOISERIES 1950



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The West Wing Brings Porcelain Chinoiseries (Le vent d'ouest apporte des chinoiseries de porcelaine)*, 1950
ink on paper, 20.3 x 25.4 cm
private collection

This work is a stunning example of Borduas's watercolours executed in 1950. The term "watercolour" should not be taken literally, since his watercolours may incorporate ink or gouache, as is the case here. Borduas works in two stages. Using a diluted watercolour pigment, he first paints the principal masses. The drying process results in various intensities of the colour (rose, ochre, gray, black); he then applies ink with a fine brush to mark the red lines of the "porcelains." The result is a delicate treatment of the whole, perfectly expressed in the title.

Thus every watercolour from 1950 interacts playfully with a world of association of ideas and forms. It comes as no surprise that they sold well when Borduas or the critic Robert Élie showed them in their respective homes in 1950, 1951, and 1952. But this also means that these works have largely remained in private collections.

THE NUN 1951

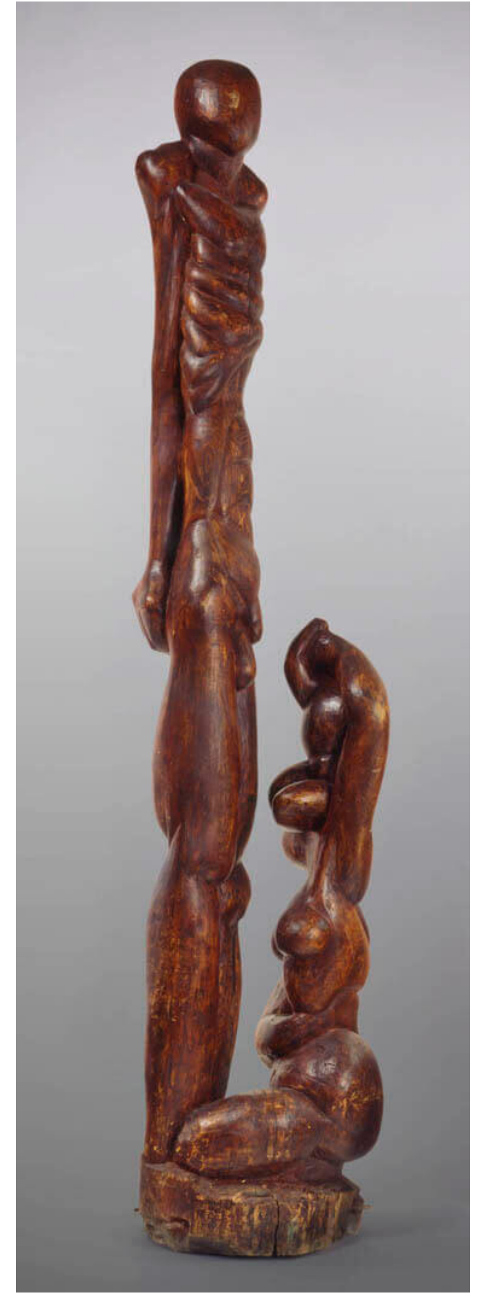


Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Nun (La religieuse)*, 1951
Wood sculpture, H 31.6 cm
Private collection

For a brief period in the winter of 1951, Borduas interrupted his two-dimensional work to devote himself to wood sculpture, producing nearly a dozen of these small statues. He writes to his friend Dr. J.E. Martin in Toronto in February, apologizing for not having replied sooner: "A sculpture—I've been making wood sculptures these days—took up all my time."[1] Small in scale, these pieces are just 28 to 35 centimetres high, with the exception of *Egypt*, at 43 centimetres. Most are named after countries: *United States, Japan, Egypt, Greece, Russia, England*, and, of course, *Canada*. The country-inspired names obscure an inherent eroticism. *The Nun*, which seems to describe a Catholic nun in prayer, is more directly erotic and controversial.

Writing to the collector L.V. Randall in February 1951, Borduas gives titles to four recently completed sculptures: "Petite paysanne au pied d'âne" (Little peasant girl with donkey's foot), "Les deux seins haut perchés" (Both breasts perched high), "Le cas feminine" (The feminine case), and "Construction érotique" (Erotic construction). It is not known what prompted him to change the titles when he exhibited them in his studio from June 2 to 4, 1951.[2] Did he wish to spare the sensibilities of his wife? Avoid shocking his children? Whatever his reasons, the allusions are mostly explicit enough that the country titles fool no one.

With this group of sculptures, which give volume to the objects in his Automatiste paintings, Borduas opened up the field of non-representational sculpture in Quebec. Although humble in scale, they foreshadow the path that sculptor Armand Vaillancourt (b. 1929) was exploring at that time; his monumental *Tree of Durocher Street* dates from 1953–54. *The Family* by Robert Roussil (1925–2013) dates from 1949; it caused such a scandal that the police withdrew it from circulation. Whereas Roussil's work was largely figurative, Borduas pursued a more abstract vein.



Robert Roussil, *The Family*, 1949, spruce, red wax coating, 318 x 74 x 66 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

THE SIGNS TAKE FLIGHT 1953



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Signs Take Flight (Les signes s'envolent)*, 1953
Oil on canvas, 114 x 148 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

The Signs Take Flight was created in the autumn of 1953, shortly after Borduas left Montreal and was living in New York. He gave the work a descriptive title, "Meeting on the Plain" (Rencontre dans la plaine), at the time it was made. As the two titles suggest, this painting announces if not the departure of the "signs" (the "objects" that feature in his earlier paintings), then at least their vanishing in the ground (the "plain"), which is also painted with a palette knife and against which they assume a greater density in the foreground of the painting. Here Borduas is moving toward the type of composition typical of his New York period: soon the last vestiges of the objects will shatter and scatter their fragments across the entire surface of the canvas.

BLOSSOMING 1956



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Blossoming (Épanouissement)*, 1956
Oil on canvas, 129.9 x 195 cm
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

Paradoxically, this painting, created soon after Borduas settled in Paris, overtly expresses an adherence to what the critic Clement Greenberg calls "American-type painting." In Paris Borduas felt more and more American, or at least North American, and less French; it had taken a move to France for him to become aware of this. *Blossoming* is testimony to the impact that New York painting had had on Borduas, and it distances him definitively from automatism as it was defined in the 1940s. This is not to say that Borduas renounces non-preconception in his painting; rather, this time the adventure follows a different compass.

A true "all-over" painting—with no hierarchy among the elements and no major focal point—*Blossoming* gives the impression that it might easily continue beyond the edges of the canvas, or that even a fragment of the painting could create the same effect as the entire work. Greenberg uses the term all-overness in his attempt to distinguish from the European tendency to compose a painting by giving more or less importance to the elements within it—such as the opposition between the centre and the periphery in the paintings of Georges Mathieu (1921–2012)—and by drawing attention to details considered the most important, such as the figures in the work of Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985). Greenberg believed that modern European painting, by

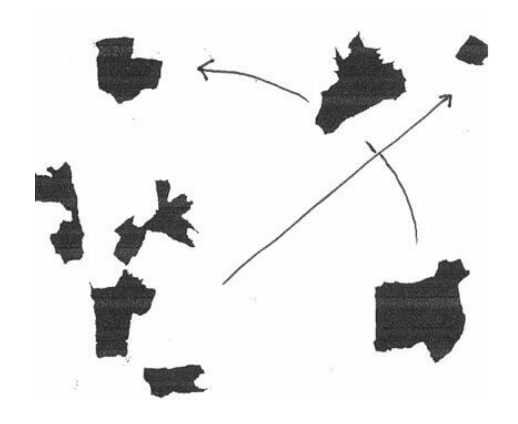
refusing to challenge its attachment to the well-composed image, gave way in prominence to the New York school of painting, which would henceforth occupy the place previously occupied by the Paris school during the first half of the twentieth century.

Blossoming was acquired by Gisèle and Gérard Lortie, collectors and friends of Borduas, at his Paris studio in February 1958.

3+4+1 1956

Paul-Émile Borduas, *3+4+1*, 1956
Oil on canvas, 199.8 x 250 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Borduas sometimes included numbers in the titles of his paintings. At first he numbered his works simply to create a personal inventory (131, 132, and so on). Later, a numbered title corresponds to the date a canvas was painted (*8.47*, for example, is August 1947) or to its number in a sequence of paintings (*19.47*, the nineteenth canvas painted in 1947). Here, *3+4+1*, and other similar titles, suggests the order in which the black spots should be read. We are directed to first read the three large ones that form an arc across the entire pictorial space, then the four at the lower left corner, and finally the small black spot that occupies the opposite corner (at the top right of the canvas).



The author's diagram of *3+4+1* shows how the viewer's eye is meant to travel over the abstract black forms in the painting.

The diagram (*right*) more clearly illustrates the path a viewer's eyes might take. Borduas wanted the viewer to take full possession of the canvas rather than focus on a detail or texture in the blacks and whites. At the same time, by introducing this essential aspect of active participation by the viewer,

he creates, in an abstract painting, the impression of movement. In addition, when colour is reduced to contrasts between black and white, the plastic quality of the painting increases.

THE BLACK STAR 1957



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Black Star (L'étoile noire)*, 1957
Oil on canvas, 162.5 x 129.5 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Long considered Borduas's masterpiece, *The Black Star* was awarded a Guggenheim International Award shortly after the artist's death. It had been under consideration for exhibition at the Guggenheim previously, during his lifetime. Writing on January 2, 1958, to Louis Archambault, who was responsible for the Canadian contribution to the Guggenheim competition, Borduas speaks of *The Black Star* as "a canvas from last winter," and therefore characteristic of the period when he returned to painting in 1957 following the interruption caused by his travels. He expresses the intention to "submit to the jury a canvas from last year… entitled *The Black Star*." But the jury gave precedence to a submission by Jack Shadbolt (1909–1998), and the posthumous prize was not awarded until 1960.

The painting displays the synthesis of Borduas's plastic language of his Parisian period: oppositions between strong contrasts (black and white) and more subtle ones (black and brown), and a calculated distribution of the black and brown spots on the white ground. The black spots never reach the periphery of the canvas but remain contained within the pictorial plane, thus ruling out a reversible reading (black on white or white on black). The suggestion of movement that emerges within the white ground by following the folds created by the palette knife are equally characteristic of Borduas's work at this time.

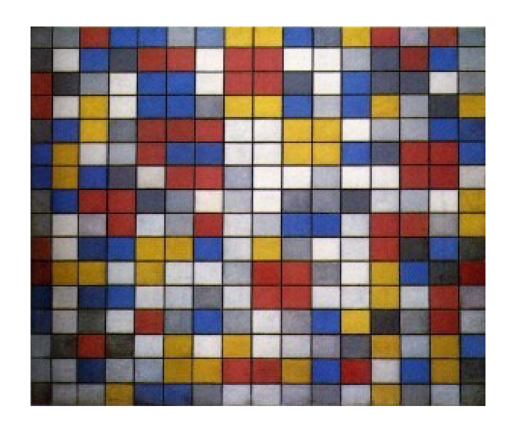
We are thus invited to contemplate a "black star" detaching itself from a white sky—the reverse of the black sky to which we are accustomed. In 1957 Borduas could not have guessed at the existence of what astronomers have been calling "black holes" since the 1960s. He created a poetic image of them *avant la lettre*, which recalls the words of one of the great poets of Quebec, Saint-Denys Garneau: "We decided to create the night / For a single small difficult star."

SYMPHONY ON A WHITE CHECKERBOARD 1957



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Symphony on a White Checkerboard* or *Symphony 2 (Symphonie en damier blanc ou Symphonie 2)*, 1957
Oil on canvas, 195 x 130 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Borduas's dialogue with the work of Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), which began in the early 1940s, reaches its peak in this painting. Undoubtedly Mondrian would have disapproved of the colour: brown tones were not part of his palette, which was limited to the primary colours—red, yellow, and blue—and the non-colours, black, grey, and white. The soft-edge lines delimiting the rectangles, not to mention the impasto in the application of the paint, would have also displeased the Dutch master. But the geometric presentation, the allusion to music in the title, and the dialogue between the different surfaces speak to a singular departure in the work of Borduas.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colours*, 1919, oil on canvas, 86 x 106 cm, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. Works such as this provided inspiration for Borduas.

What the grid achieves in Mondrian's paintings—to gather the elements of the painting at the surface, as in *Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colours*, 1919—Borduas's checkerboard achieves in equal measure, even with a palette limited to browns, blacks, pale ochre, and whites. Here Borduas has moved far away from any form of Tachism, or Lyrical Abstraction, having given equal importance to the construction of the painting, to its geometry, and to its dynamic equilibrium.

COMPOSITION 69 1960



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Composition 69*, 1960
Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 50 cm
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Composition 69 is considered Borduas's last canvas. It was seen and described by Jean-Paul Filion, the poet, singer, and writer who visited Borduas's studio on February 26, 1960, to attend the memorial service for the painter, who had died on February 22. Filion could not help but notice this canvas, still wet, propped up on the easel:

> The still-fresh painting that I see clinging to the easel, seems to me to be the pure and simple representation of a mortuary card. I'll describe it: one immense black mass covering almost the entire surface of the canvas. At the top, a thin white horizon with a hint of limpid green, in which the painter has stuck two rectangular black shapes, thus creating a fascinating view out into space. What are they doing there, these two blocks, these two masks, these two ghosts like bits of shroud, stubbornly taking up all the room in a cramped space of inaccessible light, sitting like an epigraph atop a high wall of glistening coal? I am led to see this final work as the illustration of a sort of despair experienced at the limits of the cosmos. Am I wrong in imagining that?[1]

We will never know what turn Borduas may have taken with his art; he died too young, just fifty-five years old. Does *Composition 69* indicate a move toward a kind of reversal of black and white? His final, extremely simplified canvases suggest that a breakthrough toward hard-edge painting was not unthinkable for Borduas. But all this remains mere speculation. Borduas's oeuvre culminates in an enigmatic painting, whose mystery is perfectly captured in Filion's text.



SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

As a painter, a thinker, and the leader of the Automatistes, Borduas sought a new freedom to make art, rebelling against the stifling restrictions on culture and society in Quebec. His activities exhibited a remarkable coherence of ideas, which in turn led to an unusual coherence within this avant-garde group of artists and intellectuals. The *Refus global* manifesto, with Borduas as the principal author, had an immediate impact when it was published in 1948 and later contributed to the Quiet Revolution that swept Quebec in the 1960s.

PAINTING

Before the Surrealists, the highest goal of an artist was to imitate nature. Plato's grievance against the artist was not that he imitates, but that he imitates only the appearance of things rather than reflecting their idea, or essence. Writing about tragedy, Aristotle transforms imitation into a kind of therapy aimed at purging or purifying the emotions of the spectator, who achieves catharsis. Philosophers gave a privileged place to imitation, or to one of its variations as defined by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), when treating subjects of mythology, religion, or history. It follows that the painter who imitates nature or illustrates a story has—before even setting brush to canvas—a clear idea of the scene. In this vein, the historian Louis Hourticq writes: "When Poussin 'found the idea' of *The Ravishing of St. Paul*, he ... did not begin his work until all parts of the painting and their relationship to each other were conceived in his mind."[1] It is this practice of preconception of a work that would be questioned by the Surrealists, and later by Borduas and the Automatistes.



Andre Breton, c. 1929.

Under the influence of Surrealism, Borduas discovered an entirely different way to think about the production of a painting. He read texts by the French poet André Breton in which Breton describes what might be called "automatic painting," somewhat akin to the automatic writing that he and other Surrealist writers were beginning to practice.

Breton proposes creating a painting that is not preconceived. The painter, with no model to imitate and no iconographic program to follow, sets out on an adventure: instead of imitating, the painter must "create." The old argument of Nature's design being used to demonstrate the existence of God is turned inside out. It is no longer God who creates like an artist, but the artist who creates like God—*ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Painting without a preconceived idea, as Breton and the Surrealists recommend, was thus a radical challenge to the traditional idea of the artist as imitator and of the artist's work as imitation.

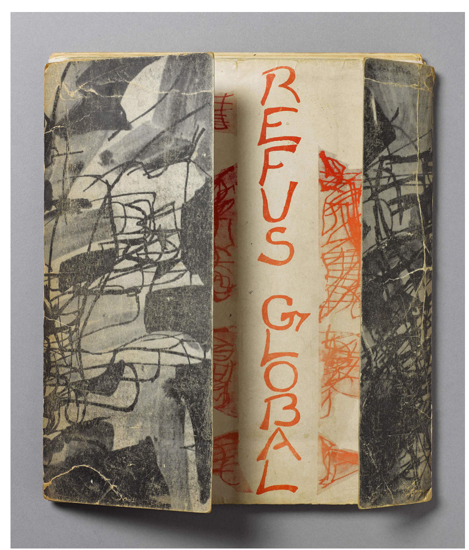


Paul-Émile Borduas, *Chanteclerc* or *No. 6*, 1942, gouache on paper, 61.7 x 47.5 cm, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. The title for this work was suggested to Borduas by the biologist Henri Laugier.

If a work is not preconceived, can it be considered complete? The answer is not always easy, even for the painter. In this new concept of the act of painting, it could be said that the painter is a witness to the evolution of the work developing in front of his eyes. The artist can give the work a title once it is finished (for example, *Sewing Machine*), but the title will never correspond to a program set out at the beginning ("I will paint a sewing machine"); it will simply be one of several possible readings of a work now considered complete. Borduas sometimes adopted titles suggested by others for his paintings (for example, the biologist Henri Laugier titled Borduas's gouache *Chanteclerc*, 1942).

POLITICAL IDEAS

For the Automatiste artist, the act of painting found its correspondence in political ideas: it could be said that anarchy is the political equivalent of what Borduas and the Automatistes sought to achieve through their art. In a text sometimes described as the first draft of the *Refus global* manifesto, Borduas clearly alludes to anarchist ideas: "We believe that social conscience can develop so that one day mankind will govern itself through a spontaneous, unrehearsed sense of order."[2]



A copy of the *Refus global* manifesto, 1948.

The anarchist social order is not imposed by external forces such as the church or the state; it is achieved through the play of individual freedoms, where the only rule is that of respect for the freedom of others. The social order is indeterminate at the beginning, but anarchists believe it cannot fail to grow once spontaneous creativity is unchecked. Although this concept has been criticized as utopian, Sam Abramovitch, a close friend of Borduas, points out that the anarchists defended what they called the "good society." In a book that searches for traces of anarchy in Quebec, the writer Mathieu Houle-Courcelles devotes several pages to the Automatistes and their connection with the anarchists in Montreal through the photographer and taxi driver Alex Primeau.[3] The Automatistes certainly had a far greater affinity with the anarchists than with the Communists, who were strictly observant Stalinists for the most part and believed in art serving the people. The development of an Automatiste practice was informed by anarchist ideas.

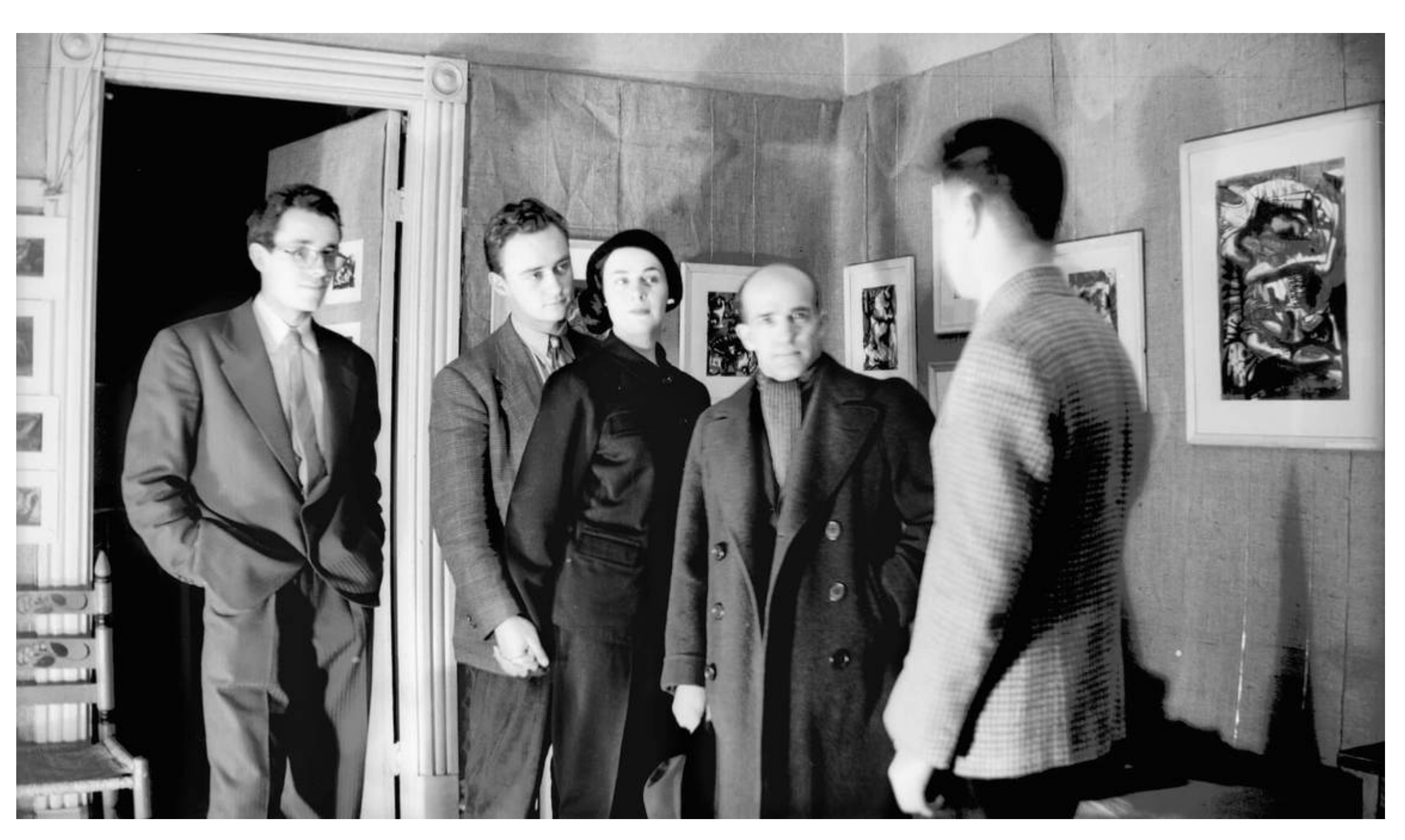
The *Refus global* manifesto had a lasting influence on politics in Quebec. It was later credited with anticipating the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s.



The Liberal Party slogan "C'est l'temps qu'ça change" (It's time things changed) was a hallmark of Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Although the Quiet Revolution took place in the 1960s, *Refus global* is credited with anticipating it.

THE GROUP

Theories on the formation of societies often base a society's origin on the idea of a contract or formal promise that commits members to respect certain behaviours that define the specific character of their group. The formation of the Automatistes could not be further from this model. The group began with informal gatherings at Borduas's studio on Mentana Street in Montreal and then at his home in Saint-Hilaire after 1945; they also met at the home of Fernand Leduc (1916–2014), without Borduas. There was nothing resembling a contract. Rather, to borrow a concept from the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, one could speak of "conventions": behaviours that take hold spontaneously within a group depending on needs—chief among them, of course, being solidarity among the members. But just like an Automatiste painting, the form that this solidarity would take was not determined in advance. No one could foresee in 1941 that the group would sign a manifesto in 1948.

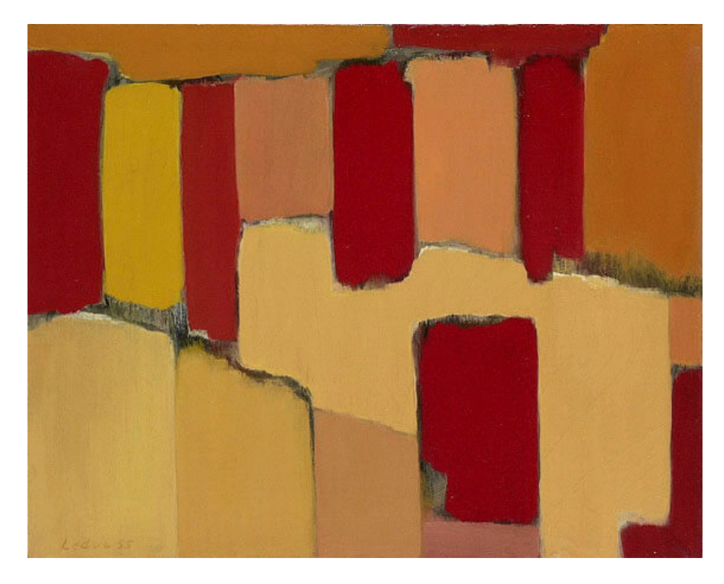


The second exhibition of the Automatistes, 1947, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West. *Left to right*: Marcel Barbeau, Pierre Gauvreau, Madeleine Arbour, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Claude Gauvreau.

In the end the solidarity of the Automatistes would prove to be somewhat fragile. In 1951 Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) published a short text in which he declared that automatism as a movement was a thing of the past. The text appeared in the catalogue for *Véhémences confrontées* (Opposing forces), an exhibition organized in Paris by the critic Michel Tapié de Céleyran and the painter Georges Mathieu (1921–2012). Riopelle's position here was paradoxical, since he remained faithful to the idea of chance in the evolution of a painting—he even spoke of "total chance"—an idea that corresponds perfectly to painting without preconception.



Jean-Paul Riopelle, *Austria III*, 1954, oil on canvas, 200 x 300.7 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Although Riopelle was part of the Automatistes, by 1951 he saw the movement as a thing of the past.



Fernand Leduc, *Red Doors*, 1955, oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (promised gift of the artist). Leduc, like Riopelle, moved beyond the ideas expressed in the *Refus global* manifesto; however, he stayed attached to the Automatistes.

Fernand Leduc, influenced by the thinker and writer Raymond Abellio, adopted ideas that no longer resonated with the anarchist ideas expressed in *Refus global*; yet Leduc stayed very attached to the Automatistes, as his correspondence with Borduas amply demonstrates. Leduc's painting, however, was more in line with the subsequent Plasticiens avant-garde movement than with the work of Borduas, Marcel Barbeau (b. 1925), Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927–1991), Pierre Gauvreau (1922–2011), or Riopelle.

The Automatistes had a powerful impact on the history of art in Quebec, and in the eyes of the world. No other Canadian movement displayed such coherence in life, in art, in ideas, and in friendship.



STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Paul-Émile Borduas created ever more radical and focused work. His artistic development is reflected in well-defined periods.

REPRESENTATIONAL PERIOD

Borduas's early work reflects his apprenticeship with the Quebec painter Ozias Leduc (1864–1955) and his academic training at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal in the 1920s. He had hoped to follow in Leduc's footsteps and become a church decorator: for this reason, in his youth Borduas never strayed from what the churches would accept in Quebec. During his first trip to Paris, where he studied at the Ateliers d'art sacré, Borduas began to explore the work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903). His representational work from the late 1930s to the early 1940s reflects these early influences.





LEFT: Ozias Leduc, *Road to the Church (Saint-Hilaire)*, 1899, charcoal heightened with white on laid paper, 34.6 x 48.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Reverend Father Carmel Brouillard, O.F.M.*, 1937, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

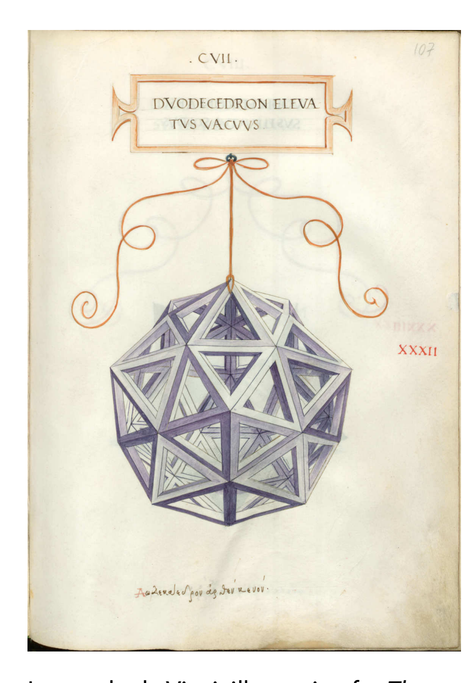
THE AUTOMATISTE PERIOD

In 1937 Borduas was hired to teach drawing and decoration at the École du meuble in Montreal. It was here, in the school's intellectually stimulating atmosphere, that Borduas discovered the work and ideas of the founder of Surrealism in France, the poet André Breton, above all through reading "Le château étoilé" in the journal *Minotaure*.

In "Le château étoilé," Borduas read Breton's description of a lesson that Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) gave his students; this would have a profound influence on the development of Borduas's art:



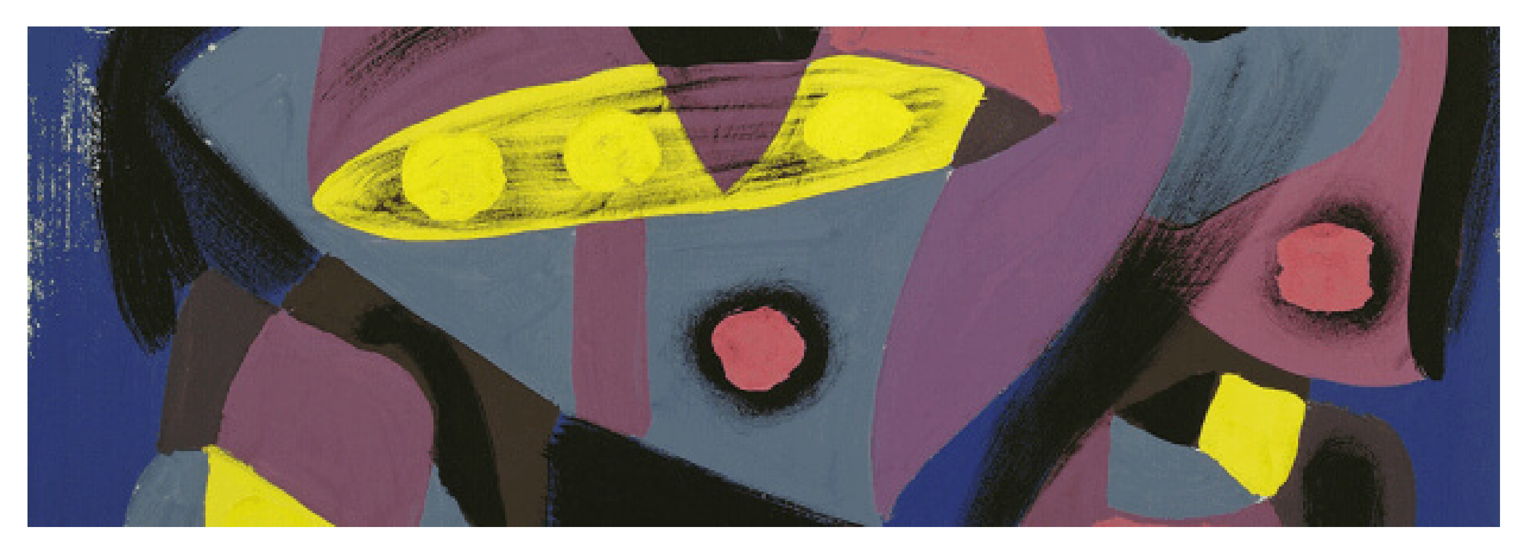
Max Ernst, frontispiece for "Le château étoilé" (1936), by André Breton. This work by the Surrealist deeply influenced Borduas.



Leonardo da Vinci, illustration for *The Divine Proportion* (1509), by Luca Pacioli. In his writing, the poet André Breton invoked Leonardo's teachings, which for him amounted to a new way of seeing the world.

> The lesson Leonardo gave his pupils, in which he encouraged them to base their pictures on what they could see "painted"—remarkably coherent and personal for each of them—on an old wall after having contemplated it for some time, is still far from understood. The whole problem of the transition from subjectivity to objectivity is implicitly resolved here, and the significance of this resolution is much greater in terms of human interest than the significance of a technique, even when that technique is one of inspiration itself.[1]

Gazing at the cracks in an old wall or reading the shapes of clouds and reproducing them in a painting may not appear to be practical endeavours for an artist. But da Vinci—through the prism of Breton—certainly seems to suggest that an artist can be without a preconceived idea before launching into a work. Inspiration for a work of art can come from somewhere unconnected to the artist's meditations or training, not to mention the iconographic styles and conventions of the time.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Composition* (detail), 1942, gouache on canvas, 58.4 x 43.2 cm, private collection. In 1941 Borduas began painting a series of gouaches, including this one, in which he applies da Vinci's advice.

In 1941 Borduas began a series of gouaches, applying da Vinci's advice. In a conversation with the art historian and critic Maurice Gagnon, Borduas shared the following revelations about his experiments with automatism, which Gagnon had the good sense to jot down:

> I begin with no preconceived idea. Faced with the white sheet, my mind free of any literary ideas, I respond to my first impulse. If I feel like placing my charcoal in the middle of the page, or to one side, I do so with no questions asked, and then go on from there. Once the first line is drawn, the page has been divided and that division starts a whole series of thoughts which proceed automatically. When I use the word "thoughts" I mean painterly thoughts: thoughts about movement, rhythm, volume and light, not literary ideas. Literary ideas are only useful if they are transformed plastically.[2]

Transferring this approach to the medium of oil posed specific problems owing to the longer drying time for oil compared with that for gouache, a water-based medium. Borduas ended up working in two stages, first painting the ground and then the "objects" suspended in front of that ground, which

recedes into infinity. In the gouaches he produced using the new approach, he perhaps unconsciously evokes the composition of a still life or portrait; the oil paintings he made from 1943 onward are reminiscent of the landscape formula.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island* or *1.47*, 1947, oil on canvas, 114.7 x 147.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This work was displayed in the second Automatiste exhibition, in 1947.

During this time, Borduas had begun to dissociate himself from his contemporaries and draw closer to a group of artists of the younger generation, including some of his students at the École du meuble. Some were members of the Automatistes, a group led by Borduas that can be dated to 1941, when they began meeting at his studio on Mentana Street. The Automatistes held two exhibitions, in 1946 and 1947; *Leeward of the Island* or *1.47*, 1947, was shown at the second of these. Borduas's activity as an Automatiste culminated in the release of the *Refus global* manifesto in 1948. The Quebec government's condemnation of the manifesto contributed to his decision to leave the country five years later.

NEW YORK PERIOD

Borduas's later work—especially his paintings from 1951 and 1952 and those he created in Provincetown, Massachusetts, just before settling in New York—reveals that he was moving toward a personal form of Abstract Expressionism. The "objects" in his Automatiste paintings become fragmented spots, or marks, applied with a palette knife, and tend to spread across the entire picture surface. By replacing the brush with the knife to paint the ground, he gives the work a new solidity, and above all, he brings the objects closer to the pictorial surface. The fusion of object and ground is imminent.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Easter (Pâques)*, 1954, oil on canvas, 183.5 x 305.5 cm, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

To say that New York painting had no influence on Borduas's work would be an exaggeration, but some aspects had little impact on him. American painting sought to create canvases halfway between mural and easel painting—that is, between painting that, in Europe, had served to transmit political or other ideologies and painting that was personal expression. Borduas's work reveals few traces of this kind of preoccupation, with the exception of one large canvas, *Easter (Pâques)*, 1954.

Borduas was more interested in the idea of affirming the primacy of the individual and the complete autonomy of painting. American painters were becoming increasingly detached from what they perceived as "beautiful painting," in the words of the critic Clement Greenberg; hence, the idea of hierarchical composition that was associated with Abstract Expressionism led them to what the same critic described as "all-over composition." In this style of painting no one focal point takes precedence over another, and there is no hierarchy among the elements: the effects are distributed evenly across the entire surface—for example, the lines in the works of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) or, equally, the colour-fields in works by Clyfford Still (1904–1980), Mark Rothko (1903–1970), and Barnett Newman (1905–1970). Malicious critics likened this genre of painting to wallpaper, where motifs are repeated in a uniform manner and where it could be said that any one part produced more or less the same effect as the whole.

In comparing Borduas's Automatiste works with this American style of painting, the differences are obvious. In the former, the objects attract attention and detach themselves from the ground, which seems to recede into infinity.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Flowered Quivers* or *8.47 (Carquois fleuris* ou *8.47)*, 1947, oil on canvas, 81.2 x 108.7 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



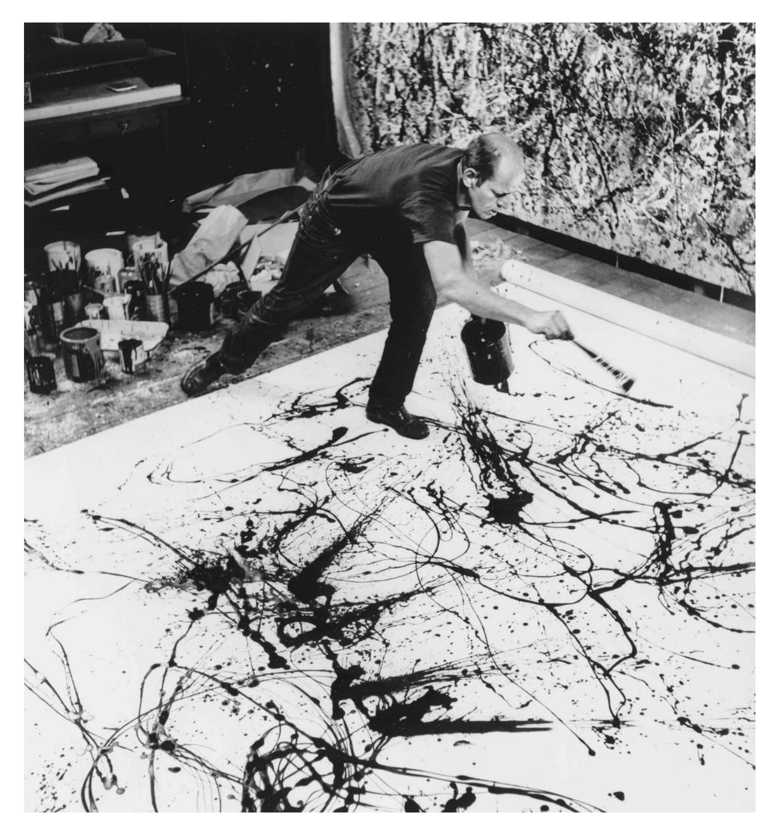
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Nature's Parachutes* or *19.47 (Parachutes végétaux* ou *19.47)*, 1947, oil on canvas, 81.8 x 109.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

There is a clear hierarchy between the object and the depth of space in which it is placed. Often Borduas attempts to illuminate the nature of the object in the title he chooses once the canvas is finished, as in *Flowered Quivers* or *Nature's Parachutes*. Some of his titles attempt to define the ground from which the objects are detached, as in *Morning Meeting* or *Figure at Dusk*, evoking the light in the morning or at the end of the day.

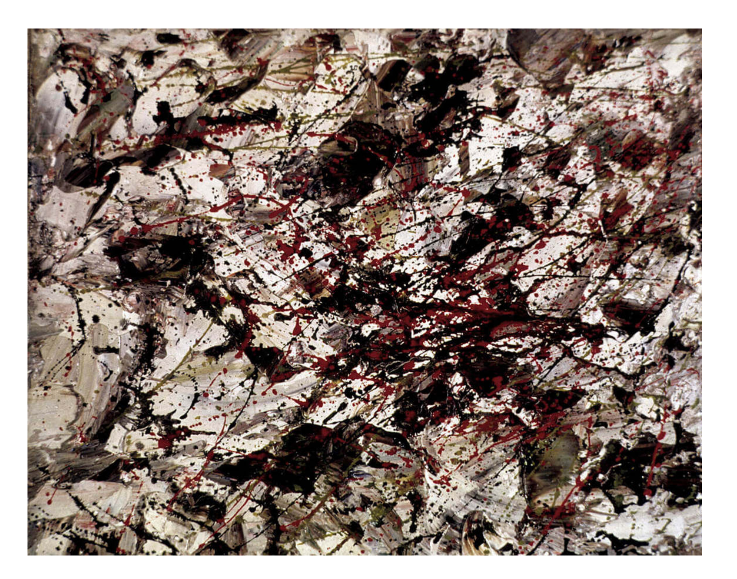
Yet Borduas ultimately questions the dichotomy of object/ground in his Automatiste paintings. The object erupts; the ground penetrates the foreground; eruptions and grounds are increasingly textured and eventually fuse into a whole, not far from recalling an all-over composition. From this perspective, the canvas *The Signs Take Flight*, 1953, no doubt precipitated this turning point for Borduas. His painting becomes increasingly assured, evident in the rich impasto, the strong sense of movement (toward either the periphery or the centre of the composition), the dramatic contrasts in the opaque colours (with white dominating), and the delicate use of transparency. Works from Borduas's New York period, including *The Joyful Wands (Les baguettes joyeuses)*, 1954, became a favourite with Canadian collectors, including Toronto art dealer Blair Laing, who regularly visited Borduas in his studio in New York and later in Paris.

A DIALOGUE WITH POLLOCK AND KLINE

In his 1954 watercolours Borduas entered into a direct dialogue with American Abstract Expressionist painting—specifically, the work of Jackson Pollock. Borduas experimented with Pollock's drip technique, though Borduas's watercolours are small in scale compared with Pollock's monumental canvases. Rather than dripping and spattering the paint, Borduas used the flick of the brush, at times repeated on either side of a central axis. This is the only discernible element of control in these watercolours, which Borduas referred to as triumphs of "accident"—creating lines or marks of variable thickness in red, black, brown, and ochre, veritable splashes. Drip painting did not have a marked influence on Borduas's work in oil, but several of his watercolours are true homages to Pollock's immense talent.



Jackson Pollock working on his painting *Autumn Rhythm*, 1951 (now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photograph by Hans Namuth. In his 1954 watercolours, Borduas entered into a dialogue with American Abstract Expressionist painting—specifically, the work of Pollock.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Graffiti*, 1954, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm, private collection. This work was painted the same year that the artist began to look closely at the work of Pollock.

It is unclear, however, whether Borduas fully understood Pollock's drip technique. He speaks of it as an "accident" multiplied ad infinitum: "For instance, the smallest accident in a painting by Pollock has the reality, and unpredictability in the universe, of a grain of sand or a mountain—and yet, without our knowing how, delivers the emotive quality of its author."[3] This notion of accident, borrowed from the Surrealists, is a poor description of Pollock's method, because it assumes that the artist has no control over the process and that where the paint falls is by chance.

So how did Pollock proceed? He began by placing his canvas on the floor, giving him a view from above. He allowed paint in a tin to drip from a stick or a dry brush. By varying his movement, at times truly dancing around the surface, Pollock was able not only to invest the lines with a unique energy—the critic B.H. Friedman would speak of "energy made visible"—but also to maintain their even distribution across the entire surface to achieve an all-over composition. Thus there does exist an important element of control, to which the notion of accident does not do justice.

Borduas uses Pollock's drip technique in his oil painting *Graffiti*, 1954, but the technique as used by Borduas does not have the structuring function it does in Pollock's paintings.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Eagle with White Family (L'aigle à la blanche famille)*, 1954, ink on paper, 27.9 x 21.6 cm, private collection. This work shows the influence of Franz Kline.



Franz Kline, *Turin*, 1960, oil on canvas, 204.1 x 242.6 cm, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

The black and white paintings of Franz Kline (1910–1962) would have a greater impact on Borduas's later development, including his Paris period. *Eagle with White Family (L'aigle à la blanche famille)*, from 1954, is characteristic in this regard. The eagle spreads its black wings in a V-shape, sending the black and coloured spots of its "white family" to the periphery, as it does to the red and green spots in the white space. Borduas shifts from using a very diluted wash to using solid, clear brush strokes. Spots escape here and there from the tree-like elements, enriching the invariably white ground in places. Although the reference to Kline is less obvious than the influence of Pollock's drip technique on his 1950s watercolours, Borduas more easily integrates Kline's grand propositions with his own universe.

PARIS AND THE BLACK AND WHITES

Borduas left for Paris in 1955, just as he was achieving some success and recognition in New York. In Paris his painting developed in a direction that was unique, though not in tune with the dominant currents in the city at that time. Neither the Lyrical Abstraction nor the geometry of the French disciples of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)—nor indeed the neo-figurative, from Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) to the New Realists—corresponds to Borduas's evolution.

In Paris Borduas painted his famous Black and White series, which included *Radiating Expansion*, 1956. The creation of this series corresponds both to his desire to clarify his ideas and to his unfailing propensity to explore new directions. Suddenly black spots appear in his work. Are they a reaffirmation of the object in the form of absence? Or are they a return to the dichotomy of object on ground, but without a suggestion of depth? Borduas speaks of "cosmic paintings," a term that, at most, could be applied to his famous painting *The Black Star*, 1957.



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Black Star (L'étoile noire)*, 1957, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 129.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Certainly the paintings of this period express his increasing determination to move toward an "architectural construction," which would continue to the painting *Symphony on a White Checkerboard* or *Symphony 2*, 1957. His work becomes increasingly austere and stripped, sometimes assuming a frankly calligraphic quality with bold signs on a white ground.

The paintings Borduas made in Paris served to only increase his *matiériste* tendency, to adopt the French expression, which relies on ever thicker impasto, allowing us to discern even the direction of the knife strokes. Paradoxically it is this material aspect that brings us closer to the presence of the painter in his canvas. To borrow from the theory of indexicality developed by American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, impasto is an index of the painter's involvement in the fabrication of his canvas, in the same way that effects are an index of their cause, without there being a resemblance between the two.[4]

IDEAS AND TEACHING

Some artists, such as Alfred Pellan (1906–1988), believe that the painter should be solely concerned with the aesthetic choices to be made. In the *Refus global* manifesto, Borduas called this position taking refuge in the "barracks of plastic arts." He believed that to create modern art the artist must take a stance on modernity on all levels—psychological, social, and political. Unsurprisingly, Borduas's artistic practice is accompanied by the writing of a manifesto and other texts on the role of the artist.



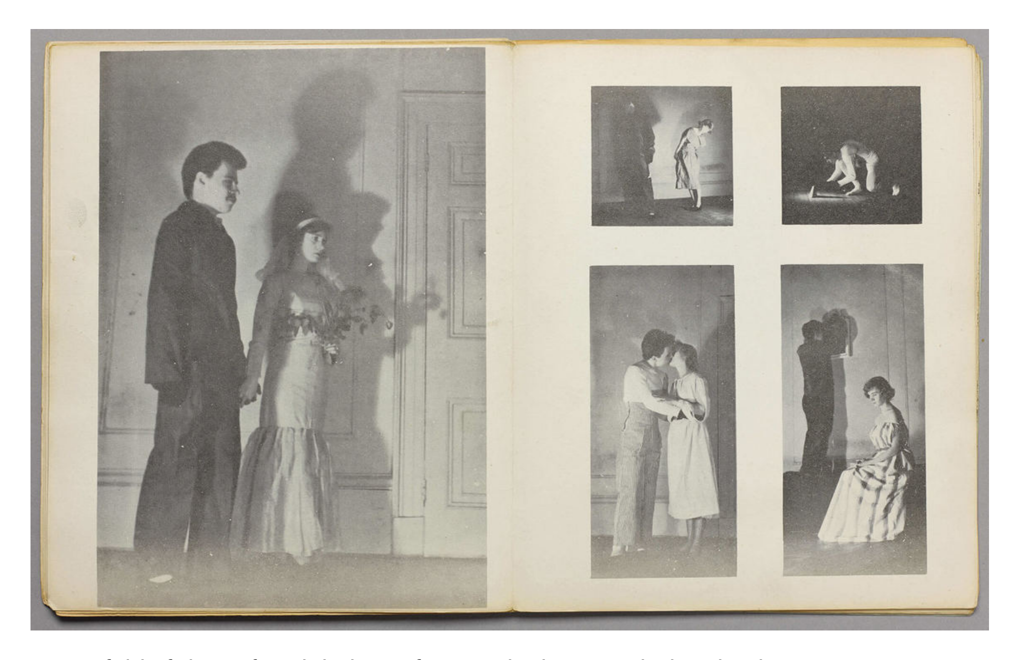
Borduas teaching at the École du meuble, c. 1942.

Borduas traces his social engagement to his experience of teaching at the École du meuble in Montreal. He describes his first students when they arrived in his class:

> And so I welcomed these first-year big boys, worried about the milieu in which they found themselves, cautious, withdrawn, impersonal to the extreme; embarking on the study of design with their entrenched prejudices, their already old passive habits [attitudes] imposed by force over the course of twelve or fifteen years of schooling: *well-behaved, silent, inhuman*. They expect precise instructions, indisputable, infallible. They are disposed toward the most complete self-denial in order to acquire a bit of skill, a few new recipes to add to a false baggage that must have been a heavy burden.[5]

In Borduas's analysis of his students, there is no mention of their knowledge of drawing: he speaks only of what is most relevant to him—their behaviour, their passivity, their total impersonality. Borduas knew that he could only hope to guide his students to discover their own style by addressing the root cause of their passivity.

> To become a creator, all that was necessary was to learn strange mechanics by means of thankless exercises: digging through and erasing to no avail and foolishly.… It was a matter of casting off this mad hope at all costs and to hide beneath a pile of personal debris and to be determined to resolve once and for all these problems of representation, of expression. The path toward individual experimentation was laid open. The student no longer seemed to be a shapeless sack but an individual at a precise moment of his development.[6]



Centrefold of the *Refus global* manifesto with photographs by Claude Gauvreau.

Borduas's text for the *Refus global* grew out of his experience with these students. He attacks two factors behind this depersonalization: the Catholic religion, with its insistence on dogma and its obsession with all things sexual; and the French-Canadian identity, as expressed in the language and traditional rural life. With no salvation outside of these two value systems, the consequence was entrapment within a kind of Quebec ghetto, along with suspicion of anything that came from outside—including the rest of Canada. (Hugh MacLennan's novel *Two Solitudes* provides an accurate depiction of the French-English divide in Quebec at this time.) It was a universe of fear: "Fear of prejudice, of public opinion, of persecutions, of general disapproval; fear of being alone, without God and the society which isolate you anyway … fear of new relationships; fear of the superrational [*sic*]; fear of necessities; fear of the floodgates opening on one man's faith—on the society of the future."[7] For many the only solution was to cave in, to conform, to follow the herd; only those who defined the culture—the clergy primarily and the politicians—came out ahead. And in the Quebec of "survival" nothing was

changing. Hence the cry, midway through the manifesto: "To hell with the goupillon and the tuque. They have seized back a thousand times what once they gave."[8] To offer escape, the manifesto seized upon anarchy—"the resplendent anarchy"[9]—the end of the reign of those who defined the culture.

SOMMAIRE

Couverture de Jean-Paul RIOPELLE, texte de Claude GAUVREAU.

The table of contents of the *Refus global* manifesto, 1948.

The effect of the *Refus global* on French-Canadian culture was enormous. (The term Québécois was not widely used until the 1960s.) *Refus global* is the refusal of the old ideology of preservation (or survival), to cite the terms used by the sociologist Marcel Rioux, which defined French-Canadian identity by its

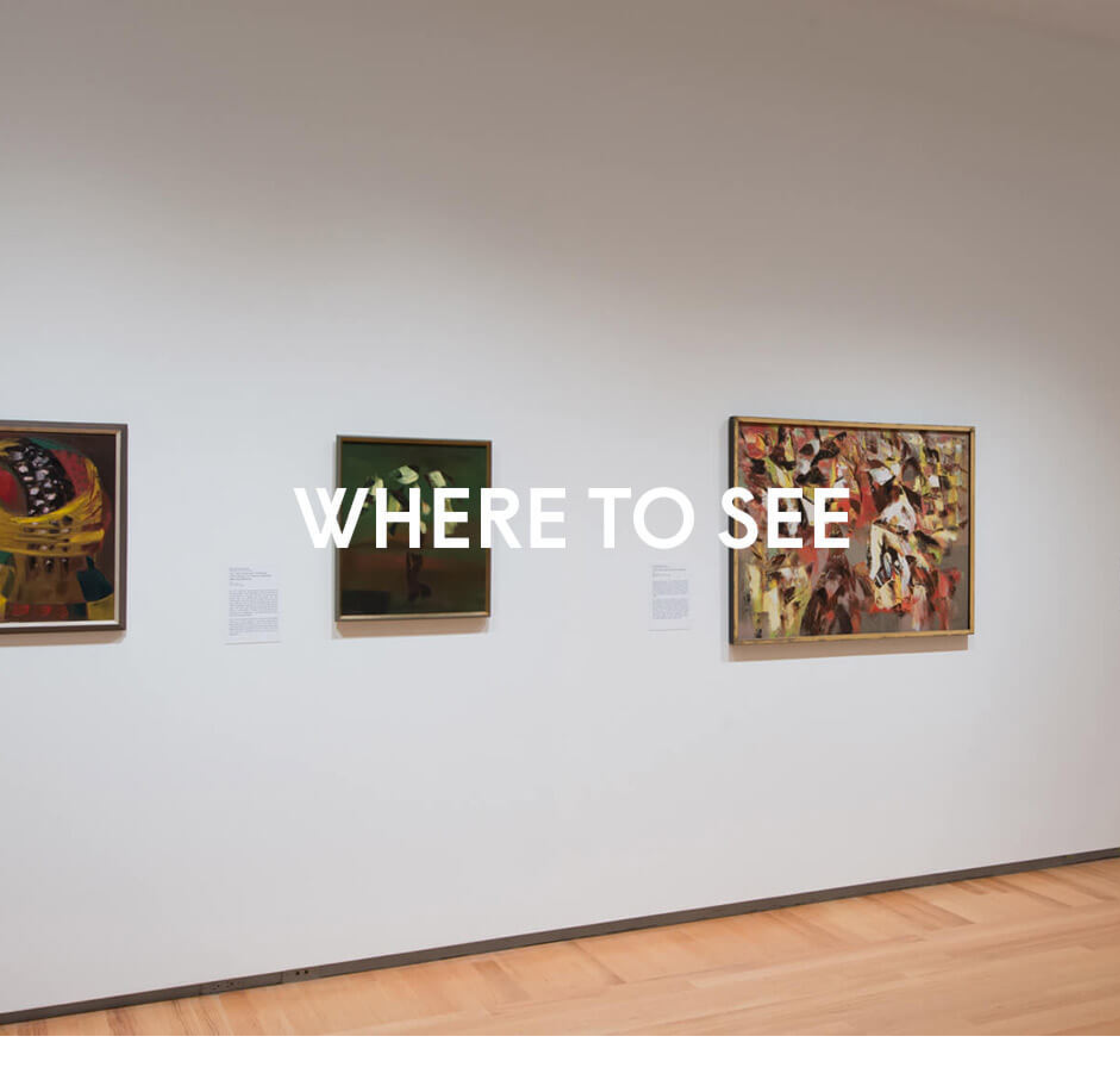
language and served as a keeper of the faith, creating an unbridgeable divide between Quebec and the Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority in the rest of Canada and in the United States. Borduas wanted to break with the idea that only a return to the soil—the affirmation of the peasant roots of French Canadians, or what those roots were believed to be—would assure the purity of the French-Canadian identity threatened by the pluralism of urban life. It was time to catch up with the evolution in thought around the world and to open themselves not only to the art being made elsewhere—Borduas was thinking above all of Paris—but also to progressive ideas: "Make way for magic! Make way for objective mysteries! Make way for love! Make way for necessities!"[10]

The *Refus global* manifesto was released on August 9, 1948, with the main text written by Borduas; it was countersigned by fifteen members of the Automatistes. Needless to say its release had a profound impact over the course of the subsequent months. No less than a hundred articles roundly criticized it, and it was rare indeed to find one that came to its defence.[11] Even the Catholics of the left, who were at times fairly closely allied with Borduas (including journalist and future politician Gérard Pelletier; Jacques Dubuc, a friend of Pelletier; Robert Élie, the writer, art critic, and future director of the Canada Council for the Arts; and journalist André Laurendeau) withdrew their solidarity, joining the ranks of Roger Duhamel, Harry Bernard, Father Hyacinthe-Marie Robillard, and Father Ernest Gagnon, who were far more negative in their stance toward the ideas expressed in the manifesto.



The second exhibition of the Automatistes, at the Gauvreau apartment, 1947. *Left to right:* Claude Gauvreau, Madame Gauvreau-Saint-Mars, Pierre Gauvreau, Marcel Barbeau, Madeleine Arbour, Borduas, Mimi Lalonde, Bruno Cormier, and Jean-Paul Mousseau.

Despite the immediate denouncements, the manifesto marked the beginning of profound social change in Quebec. Since the publication of the complete writings of Borduas, the originality of his thought is steadily becoming clearer. Every ten years, there are celebrations in Quebec commemorating the publication of *Refus global*, which signalled the dawn of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec.



WHERE TO SEE

Although the works listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.

ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

123 King Street West
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-527-6610
artgalleryofhamilton.com



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Spring Morning* (*Matin de printemps*), 1937
Oil on canvas
30.5 x 39.3 cm

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net



Paul-Émile *Borduas, Abstract in Blue* (*Abstraction en bleu*), 1959
Oil on canvas
92.1 x 73.4 cm

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion
1380 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
514-285-2000
mbam.qc.ca/en



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Green Abstraction* (*Abstraction verte*), 1941
Oil on canvas
26 x 36 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Flowered Quivers or 8.47* (*Carquois fleuris ou 8.47*), 1947
Oil on canvas
81.2 x 108.7 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Signs Take Flight* (*Les signes s'envolent*), 1953
Oil on canvas
114.3 x 147.3 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Radiating Expansion* (*Expansion rayonnante*), 1956
Oil on canvas
115.7 x 89 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Black Star* (*L'étoile noire*), 1957
Oil on canvas
162.5 x 129.5 cm



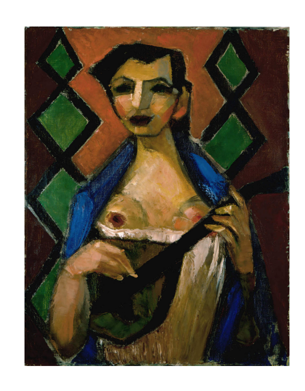
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Symphony on a White Checkerboard or Symphony 2* (*Symphonie en damier blanc ou Symphonie 2*), 1957
Oil on canvas
195 x 130 cm



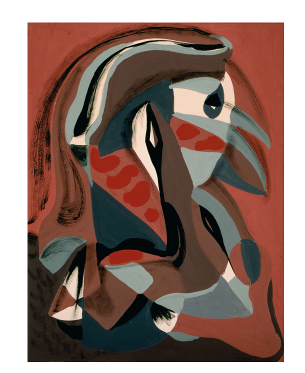
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Composition 69*, 1960
Oil on canvas
195 x 130 cm

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

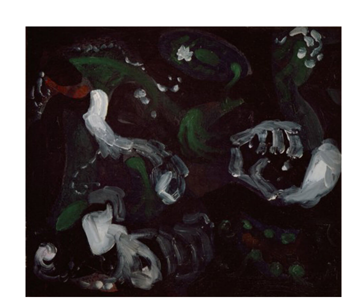
185 Ste-Catherine Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
514-847-6226
macm.org/en



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Woman with a Mandolin* (*Femme à la mandoline*), 1941
Oil on canvas
81.3 x 65 cm



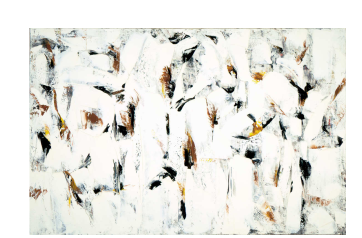
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Chanteclerc* or *No. 6*, 1942
Gouache on paper
61.7 x 47.5 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Rape at the Limits of Matter* (*Viol aux confins de la matière*), 1943
Huile sur toile
40.4 x 46.5 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Easter* (*Pâques*), 1954
Oil on canvas183.5 x 305.5 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Blossoming* (*Épanouissement*), 1956
Oil on canvas
129.9 x 195 cm

MUSÉE NATIONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS DU QUÉBEC

Quebec City, Quebec, Canada
1-866-220-2150 or 418-643-2150
mnbaq.org/en



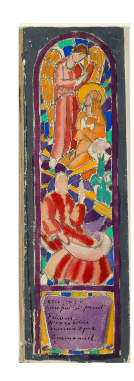
Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Joyful Wands* (*Les baguettes joyeuses*), 1954
Ink and gouache on paper
60.2 x 45.4 cm

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

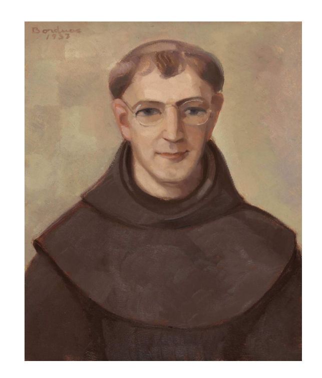
380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985 or 1-800-319-ARTS (2787)
gallery.ca



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Decorative Project for the Chapel of a Château, No. 1: Study for Choir Elevation*, 1927
Gouache over graphite on wove paper
20.2 x 12.1 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Decorative Project for the Chapel of a Château, No. 4: Study for Stained Glass Window*, 1927
Gouache over graphite on wove paper
46 x 38 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Reverend Father Carmel Brouillard, O.F.M.*, 1937
Oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm



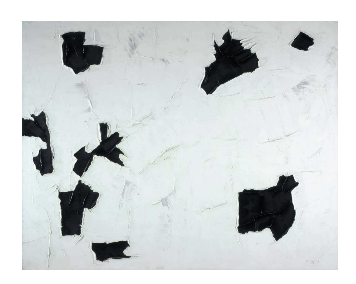
Paul-Émile Borduas, *Still Life: Pineapples and Pears* (*Nature morte. Ananas et poires*), 1941
Oil on canvas
49.9 x 60 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island or 1.47* (*Sous le vent de l'île ou 1.47*), 1947
Oil on canvas
114.7 x 147.7 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Nature's Parachutes or 19.47* (*Parachutes végétaux ou 19.47*), 1947
Oil on canvas
81.8 x 109.7 cm



Paul-Émile Borduas, *3+4+1*, 1956
Oil on canvas
199.8 x 250 cm

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Paul-Émile Borduas, *Forgotten Forms* (*Formes oubliées*), 1958
Oil on linen
49.5 x 51 cm

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Paul-Émile Borduas, *The Phantom Boat* (*Le bateau fantasque*), 1942
Oil on canvas
48.2 x 58.4 cm

NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. The exhibition ran from February 15 to March 1, 1947. See François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada 1976), 18.

2. Excerpt from a letter, G. Poisson, Quebec minister of youth and social welfare, to Jean-Marie Gauvreau, director of the École du meuble, September 2, 1948. The reasons for Borduas's dismissal were also published, in an article by François Léger, "L'affaire Borduas," *Le Quartier latin*, October 8, 1948. See Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings*, 1942–1958, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 15, 19n3, and 19n2.

3. Borduas wrote the seven-page text over the course of one week in early April 1950 and made copies to send to all members of the group. The essay was printed in *La Presse*, July 12, 1969. Gaston Leduc fonds, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.

4. Gaston Leduc fonds, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec.

5. Laurier Lacroix, *Sam Abramovitch: Conversations en suspens* (Montreal: Éditions du Passage, 2013), 44.

6. Private archives of Madame G. Viau. Guy Viau was a former student of Borduas at École du meuble.

7. Its better-known location was 32 East 69th Street, New York.

8. It seems that the encounter between the French critic and Borduas never took place.

9. Pierre Restany, "Spontanéité et réflexion," *Cimaise*, April/May 1959, 44.

KEY WORKS: STUDY OF A SPARROW HAWK IN A DECORATIVE LANDSCAPE

1. See François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas* (Montreal: Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, 1988), 33, fig. 11, for a reproduction of this view of the convent of Saints-Noms-de-Jésus-et-de-Marie, Hochelaga, Montreal.

KEY WORKS: WOMAN WITH A MANDOLIN

1. The current title was established in the article "Exposition Borduas au Vieux Colombier," *Montréal-Matin*, April 28, 1942, 6.

2. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, "Questions et réponses (Réponses à une enquête de J.-R. Ostiguy)," in Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 145.

KEY WORKS: GREEN ABSTRACTION

1. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, "Questions et réponses (Réponses à une enquête de J.-R. Ostiguy)," in Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 145.

2. This CBC interview from December 21, 1950, is preserved in the Centre d'archives Gaston-Miron at the Université de Montréal and transcribed in Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits I*, ed. André-G. Bourassa, Jean Fisette, and Gilles Lapointe (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1987), 621.

KEY WORKS: STUDY FOR TORSO OR NO. 14

1. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, "Travelling Exhibitions Display a Confusion of Purpose," in Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 117–18.

2. Charles Doyon, "L'exposition surréaliste de Borduas," *Le Jour*, May 2, 1942.

KEY WORKS: LEEWARD OF THE ISLAND OR 1.47

1. François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas*, Canadian Artists Series, edited by Dennis Reid (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 18.

2. Tancrède Marsil, "Les Automatistes: École de Borduas," *Le Quartier latin*, February 28, 1947, 4.

3. Borduas refers here to the spatial structure, which places these pictures in the Surrealist tradition. However, the shapes are "more arbitrary and less literary" in nature, thus departing from Surrealism. See Francois-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas*, Canadian Artists Series, edited by Dennis Reid (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 18.

KEY WORKS: THE NUN

1. Francois-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Biographie critique et analyse de l'oeuvre* (Montreal: Fides, 1978), 304n4.

2. Letter to L.V. Randall, February 26, 1951. The letter included a list of "photos sent to M. Randall for New York," containing these four titles for the sculptures. See François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Biographie critique et analyse de l'œuvre* (Montreal: Fides, 1978), 304n7.

KEY WORKS: COMPOSITION 69

1. Jean-Paul Filion, "Les obsèques de Borduas à Paris," *Liberté*, March/April 1961, 519.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Louis Hourticq, *De Poussin à Watteau: Ou des origines de l'école parisienne*

de peinture (Paris: Hachette, 1921), 59.

2. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, “La transformation continuelle…,” in Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 38.

3. Mathieu Houle-Courcelles, *Sur les traces de l’anarchisme au Québec (1860–1960)* (Montreal: Lux éditeur, 2008).

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. André Breton, *L’amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 125–26.

2. François-Marc Gagnon, *Paul-Émile Borduas: A Critical Biography*, trans. Peter Feldstein (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2013), 121.

3. Paul-Émile Borduas, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 139.

4. Charles Peirce organizes classes of signs into three sets, one of which is “icon, index, symbol.” In this context, Peirce argues that indexicality means that a sign represents an object by virtue of an existential connection to it.

5. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Liberating Projections,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 95. The italics are in the original.

6. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Liberating Projections,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 95–96.

7. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Global Refusal,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 46–47.

8. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Global Refusal,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 46. The *goupillon* is a symbol of Catholicism, used at the beginning of the mass to sprinkle the faithful with holy water, in remembrance of baptism. The tuque, or woollen cap, was a symbol of Quebec, especially the narrow nationalism promoted by the regime of provincial premier Maurice Duplessis. The symbol dates to 1837, during the Rebellion of Lower Canada, when the Patriote forces adopted the clothing of the habitant as their uniform, including the tuque; this symbol was revived briefly in the 1960s by the Front de libération du Québec.

9. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Global Refusal,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 54.

10. Paul-Émile Borduas, “Global Refusal,” in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958*, ed. François-Marc Gagnon, trans. François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1978), 51.

11. François-Marc Gagnon and Nicole Boily, “Paul-Émile Borduas: Projections libérantes” (annotated edition produced under the direction of François-Marc Gagnon), *Études françaises* 8, no. 3 (August 1972): 243–305.

GLOSSARY

Abstract Expressionism
A style that flourished in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, defined by its combination of formal abstraction and self-conscious expression. The term describes a wide variety of work; among the most famous Abstract Expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning.

Alberti, Leon Battista (Italian, 1404–1472)
The author of treatises on painting, sculpture, and architecture—together, these three texts serve as the theoretical basis for all of Renaissance art—Alberti is credited with standardizing the forms of classical design.

Appel, Karel (Dutch, 1921–2006)
An artist whose work in diverse media includes expressionist and primitivist paintings and assemblages, olive-wood sculptures, stained glass windows, poetry, and the set design for the choreographer Min Tanaka's 1987 ballet *Can We Dance a Landscape?*

Arman (French/American, 1928–2005)
A sculptor and painter born Armand Fernandez in France, whose work became increasingly experimental over the course of his career. Arman was affiliated with the Nouveau réalisme movement of the 1960s, and he is best known for his "accumulations" of objects.

Art Association of Montreal (AAM)
Founded in 1860 as an offshoot of the Montreal Society of Artists (itself dating to 1847), the Art Association of Montreal became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1947. The MMFA is now a major international museum, with more than 760,000 visitors annually.

Ateliers d'art sacré
Founded in 1919 by Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières, the Ateliers trained artists to produce religious decoration for churches—particularly those destroyed in the First World War. This Paris-based initiative helped to renew interest in Christian art in France.

Automatistes
A Montreal-based artists' group interested in Surrealism and the Surrealist technique of automatism. Centred on the artist, teacher, and theorist Paul-Émile Borduas, the Automatistes exhibited regularly between 1946 and 1954, making Montreal a locus of mid-century avant-garde art. Members included Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Fernand Leduc, and Françoise Sullivan.

Barbeau, Marcel (Canadian, b. 1925)
A member of the Automatistes and a former student of its founder, Paul-Émile Borduas, at the École du meuble in Montreal. Barbeau alternated between a free approach in the Automatiste vein and painting in a hard-edge style with pure colour.

Breton, André (French, 1896–1966)
A poet and the leader of the Surrealists, whose members included the artists Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí, and Man Ray, and the poets Paul and Gala Éluard. Breton outlined in successive manifestos the tenets and techniques of Surrealism, and he organized the group's first exhibition in 1925.

Burri, Alberto (Italian, 1915–1995)
A former doctor, Burri started painting as a prisoner of war in the United States in the early 1940s, eventually incorporating unorthodox materials into his work, such as burlap sacks and sand. In 1951 he co-founded—with Mario Ballocco, Ettore Colla, and Giuseppe Capogrossi—the Gruppo Origine, which opposed the decorative aspect of abstract art, preferring its "incisive, expressive function."

César (French, 1921–1998)
A sculptor associated with Nouveau réalisme, César Baldaccini often used scrap materials, including lead, copper pipe, and metal car parts (as in his controversial sculpture of a crushed automobile, *Compression*, 1960). In their simplicity, his sculptures of the 1950s and early 1960s are considered to have prefigured Minimalism.

Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)
A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including portraits of his wife, still lifes, and Provençal landscapes.

Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille (French, 1796–1875)
Although known today as a landscape painter—among the most influential of the nineteenth century—and the leading member of the Barbizon school of French nature painters, Corot rose to prominence in his own time for the Romantic tableaux he exhibited regularly at the Paris Salon.

Cubism
A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

Dalí, Salvador (Spanish, 1904–1989)
The star of the Surrealists and one of his era's most exuberant personalities, Dalí is best known for his naturalistically rendered dreamscapes. *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, with its melting clock faces, remains one of the twentieth century's most parodied artworks.

de Kooning, Willem (Dutch/American, 1904–1997)
Although a prominent Abstract Expressionist, de Kooning was not concerned with strict abstraction—figures appear in the dense and riotous brushwork that

characterizes much of his work. Among his most famous works are those of the Women series, first exhibited in 1953 to much critical scorn.

Denis, Maurice (French, 1870–1943)
A painter, printmaker, designer, and influential theorist whose ideas contributed to the development of the anti-naturalist aesthetic of modernism. Denis was a founding member of the Nabis, an avant-garde artists' group active in Paris from 1888 to 1900, and is also well known for his later, overtly religious works.

Desvallières, Georges (French, 1861–1950)
A painter heavily influenced early in his career by the Symbolist Gustave Moreau. Desvallières's later work portrayed daily life. Still later he concentrated on painting religious subjects; in 1919 he founded the Ateliers d'art sacré with Maurice Denis.

Dubuffet, Jean (French, 1901–1985)
A rebellious avant-garde artist whose career spanned some fifty years and encompassed painting, sculpting, and printmaking. Dubuffet railed against intellectual authority in culture, countering it with *art brut* (literally, "raw art"). His oeuvre evidences frequent shifts in style and impassioned experimentation.

Fautrier, Jean (French, 1898–1964)
Employing overtly figurative or abstract styles, Fautrier created etchings, paintings, book illustrations, and sculpture. He is associated with 1950s Art Informel, though the gestural style seen in several of his paintings of the 1920s prefigures this movement by several decades.

Ferron, Marcelle (Canadian, 1924–2001)
A painter, sculptor, and stained-glass artist and a member of the Montreal-based Automatistes. Ferron studied at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) before meeting Paul-Émile Borduas, whose approach to modern art became crucial to her artistic development. In 1953 she moved to France, where she lived for thirteen years.

Fink, Don (American, b. 1923)
An abstract painter whose work is frequently gestural and calligraphic in style. Fink studied at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Art Students League of New York before moving to Paris in the 1950s, where he participated in several solo and group exhibitions.

Fontana, Lucio (Argentine/Italian, 1899–1968)
An innovative abstract sculptor and painter born in Argentina. In Milan in 1947 Fontana founded Spazialismo, a movement that prefigured performance and Land art in its concern for time, space, and dynamism. In the late 1940s he began to slash and puncture his paintings, a novel technique intended to refute the canvas's flatness.

Francis, Sam (American, 1923–1994)
A painter and printmaker known for his expressive use of light and colour. Francis was influenced by the Quebec artist Jean-Paul Riopelle, whom he met

while in Paris in the 1950s. Although associated with both Art Informel and Post-Painterly Abstraction, Francis was reluctant to be aligned with any movement.

Gauguin, Paul (French, 1848–1903)
A member—with Vincent van Gogh, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne—of the group of painters now considered the Post-Impressionists, Gauguin is known for his use of colour and symbolism and for his daring compositions. The paintings he made in Tahiti, representing an idealized "primitive" culture, are among his most famous.

Gauvreau, Jean-Marie (Canadian, 1903–1970)
An important figure in the history of Canadian decorative arts and design, Gauvreau helped transform Montreal's École technique into the École du meuble. The school became a centre for Quebec's avant-garde, drawing artists like Paul-Émile Borduas and others associated with the 1948 *Refus global* manifesto.

Gauvreau, Pierre (Canadian, 1922–2011)
A painter, writer, and television producer/director, Gauvreau met Paul-Émile Borduas in 1941 when Gauvreau was a student at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal). The paintings he made before he joined the Automatistes in the late 1940s demonstrate a Fauvist influence. He returned to a free style of painting later in his life.

gouache
An artists' material, gouache is watercolour that is mixed with white pigment and the binding agent gum arabic, rendering it opaque. Gouache has been used in numerous painting traditions from antiquity, including manuscript illumination and Indian and European miniatures.

Greenberg, Clement (American, 1909–1994)
A highly influential art critic and essayist known primarily for his formalist approach and his contentious concept of modernism, which he first outlined in his 1961 article "Modernist Painting." Greenberg was, notably, an early champion of Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith.

grid
A structural basis for paintings formed by a series of lines crossing each other at right angles, used most famously by Piet Mondrian. Grids affirm the common characteristics of modern painting: flatness and "all-overness," as the critic Clement Greenberg described it.

hard-edge painting
A technical term coined in 1958 by the art critic Jules Langsner, referring to paintings marked by well-defined areas of colour. It is widely associated with geometric abstraction and the work of artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland.

Hartung, Hans (German/French, 1904–1989)
An abstract artist who left Germany for Paris, Hartung was preoccupied early in his career with the idea of perfect compositional harmony, as manifested in combinations of colour, movement, and proportion. His gestural paintings of the 1940s are considered the forebears of action painting.

Hess, Esther (Swiss, b. 1919)
An abstract sculptor and installation artist trained in Zurich and Berlin who works primarily in a minimalist mode. Hess also creates tapestries and paintings and incorporates a wide range of materials into her work, such as Plexiglas, lead, crystal, wood, granite, sulphur, and iron.

Hofmann, Hans (German/American, 1880–1966)
A major figure in Abstract Expressionism and a renowned teacher. Hofmann's career began in Paris, where he moved to study in 1904. In 1915 he founded an art school in Munich that eventually drew international students, including the American Louise Nevelson, and taught there until the early 1930s, when he immigrated to the United States. Little of his early work survives.

Hultberg, John (American, 1922–2005)
An artist of international education and broad influence. Hultberg trained in Mexico and the United States, taught at the Brooklyn Museum Art School and the Honolulu Academy of Arts (now the Honolulu Museum of Art), and lived in Paris from 1954 to 1959. Although often formally Surrealist, Hultberg's paintings are too wide-ranging stylistically to align him with that movement.

impasto
Paint applied so thickly that it stands out in relief and retains the marks of the brush or palette knife.

Klein, Yves (French, 1928–1962)
An important figure in the history of Minimal, Pop, and performance art, known for his interest in "pure colour" and his invention of International Klein Blue, the pigment he used in many of his famed monochrome paintings. He was also a sculptor, writer, and—significantly for a Westerner of his time—judo master.

Kline, Franz (American, 1910–1962)
An Abstract Expressionist painter and draftsman whose gestural works drew inspiration from contemporaries such as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning. From the late 1940s Kline's paintings were largely black and white, but in the last years of his career he returned to a full-colour palette.

Leduc, Fernand (Canadian, 1916–2014)
A painter and member of the Montreal-based Automatistes. Leduc's earlier paintings evince his interest in Surrealism and automatism; later he began to work in a more formalist mode and then in a hard-edge style, which linked him to the Plasticien movement.

Leduc, Ozias (Canadian, 1864–1955)
A painter and church muralist whose work conveys a sense of intimacy and

tranquility. Leduc's religious paintings—which decorate chapels in Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New England—combine devotional iconography with a Symbolist use of light and colour. Leduc is also known as a painter of still lifes and landscapes.

Leonardo da Vinci (Italian, 1452–1519)
The patriarch of the Italian High Renaissance and the creator of the *Mona Lisa*, 1503. Loenardo da Vinci's paintings, sculptures, and architectural and decorative designs altered ideas of what Western art could be, and his writings influenced the concepts of ideal artistic representation and expression through the modern era.

Lyrical Abstraction
A style of abstract art that arose within the larger movement of Art Informel, itself known as the European complement of American Abstract Expressionism. Art Informel paintings typically drew inspiration from the natural world; they were less rigid and more expressive than geometric abstraction, which was dominant at the time.

Mahias, Robert (French, 1890–1962)
A prominent decorative artist in Paris, Mahias moved to Montreal in the 1920s, where he taught at the École des beaux-arts (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) and created artwork for churches in the United States and Canada. On his return to Paris he taught at the École des arts appliqués.

Mathieu, Georges (French, 1921–2012)
A sculptor, designer, illustrator, and painter who became interested in abstract painting in the 1940s. Mathieu's work is associated with several similar postwar European movements—including Tachism and Art Informel—that privilege geometric abstraction and spontaneous mark making, and which he helped to pioneer.

matiérisme
A painting technique whereby successive layers of thickness and impasto are applied, and sometimes non-traditional matter, such as sand, gravel, plaster, or wax. The technique is generally associated with the European Art Informel movement of the 1950s and can be traced to the works of Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet.

modernism
A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Beginning in painting with the Realist movement led by Gustave Courbet, it progressed through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

Mondrian, Piet (Dutch, 1872–1944)
A leading figure in abstract art, known for his geometric "grid" paintings of

straight black lines and brightly coloured squares, whose influence on contemporary visual culture has been called the most far-reaching of any artist. Mondrian saw his highly restrictive and rigorous style, dubbed Neo-Plasticism, as expressive of universal truths.

Mousseau, Jean-Paul (Canadian, 1927–1991)
A painter, illustrator, and designer, and a fervent advocate of integrating art into architecture. Mousseau was a favoured protégé of Paul-Émile Borduas and the youngest of the Montreal-based Automatistes. He was a prominent figure of the Montreal arts scene and worked in a range of media, including plastic, neon, and aluminum.

Newman, Barnett (American, 1905–1970)
A key proponent of Abstract Expressionism, known primarily for his colour-field paintings. Newman's writings of the 1940s argue for a break from European artistic traditions and the adoption of techniques and subject matter more suited to the troubled contemporary moment, and for the expression of truth as he saw it.

Nouveau réalisme (New Realism)
An avant-garde movement founded in 1960 by the art critic Pierre Restany and the painter Yves Klein. Influenced by Dada, the New Realists often used collage and assemblage, incorporating objects into their works.

Pascin, Jules (Bulgarian, 1885–1930)
Active most of his life in Paris, Pascin produced prints, paintings, and drawings that capture a bohemian existence spent in brothels, in nightclubs, on nighttime city streets, and travelling in the southern United States and Cuba. His best-known works are studies from the 1920s of nude or half-dressed teenage girls.

Pellan, Alfred (Canadian, 1906–1988)
A painter active in Paris art circles in the 1930s and 1940s. In Montreal Pellan taught at the École des beaux-arts (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) from 1943 to 1952. He was the leader of the short-lived Prisme d'yeux (1948), a painters' group that opposed and wanted to discredit the ideas of the Automatistes. His work from the 1950s on is markedly Surrealist.

Perron, Maurice (Canadian, 1924–1999)
A photographer close to the Automatistes, Perron first met Paul-Émile Borduas when he was a student at Montreal's École du meuble, where Borduas taught until 1948. His elegant and sometimes striking photographs of the group's members, activities, artwork, and performances illustrate most of the Automatistes' publications. Perron was a signatory to the 1948 *Refus global* manifesto.

Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)
One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1906–7, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

Plasticiens
A Montreal-based artists' group active from 1955 to 1959. Although not opposed to their contemporaries the Automatistes, the Plasticiens encouraged a more formalist, less subjective approach to abstract art, such as that of Neo-Plasticist Piet Mondrian. Members included Louis Belzile, Jean-Paul Jérôme, Fernand Toupin, and Jauran (Rodolphe de Repentigny).

Poliakoff, Serge (French, 1906–1969)
Born in Russia, the painter Poliakoff moved first to London and then to Paris. Influenced most notably by Robert Delaunay, he became increasingly devoted to abstract art after 1938. He is known primarily for his exceptional mastery of colour and remains a significant figure in postwar abstract painting.

Pollock, Jackson (American, 1912–1956)
Leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement, best known for his drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Pollock is also closely associated with action painting, in which the act of painting is gestural and the artist approaches the canvas with little notion of what he or she will create.

Raysse, Martial (French, b. 1936)
A self-taught painter, assemblage artist, and filmmaker associated with Nouveau réalisme. Raysse's early work, which drew from advertising and consumer culture, prefigured that of later Pop artists, while his paintings of the 1970s demonstrate an interest in mythology and representations of the natural world.

***Refus global* (total refusal)**
A manifesto released in 1948 by the Automatistes, a Montreal-based artists' group. Written by Paul-Émile Borduas and signed by fifteen other members, the main text condemned the dominance of Catholic ideology and the social and political status quo in Quebec. The *Refus global* influenced the province's period of rapid change that came to be known as the Quiet Revolution.

Renoir, Pierre-Auguste (French, 1841–1919)
One of the foremost figures of the Impressionist movement. Renoir's prints, paintings, and sculptures often depict scenes of leisure and domestic ease. He left the Impressionists in 1878 to participate again in the Paris Salon, the city's officially sanctioned annual art exhibition.

Riopelle, Jean-Paul (Canadian, 1923–2002)
A towering figure in Québécois modern art who, like the other members of the Automatistes, was interested in Surrealism and abstract art. Riopelle moved to Paris in 1947, where he participated in the last major exhibition of the Parisian Surrealists, organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton.

Rothko, Mark (American, 1903–1970)
A leading figure of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko began his career as an illustrator and watercolourist. In the late 1940s he developed the style that would come to define his career, creating intense colour-field oil paintings that express the same anxiety and mystery that informed his earlier figurative work.

Rouault, Georges (French, 1871–1958)
Known for his highly personal and expressive style, Rouault first gained notoriety in the early 1900s with his compassionate renderings of prostitutes and other marginalized people. Informed by Christian spiritualism, his work was finally embraced by the church shortly before his death.

Roussil, Robert (Canadian, 1925–2013)
A figurative sculptor most interested in the human form, Roussil worked in wood, bronze, and concrete. He completed numerous public projects, including a piece installed along the Ville-Marie Autoroute in Montreal. A member of the Sculptors Association in Quebec, he was also active in France from 1957 onward.

Rupture inaugurale
A Surrealist manifesto issued in 1947 in Paris, signalling a break between the Surrealists, who sought a revolution of consciousness, and the Communist Party, who stressed the need for social revolution. Although the Automatistes were closely associated with the Surrealists, Jean-Paul Riopelle was the only member to sign.

Shadbolt, Jack (Canadian, 1909–1998)
Primarily known as a painter and draftsman, Shadbolt studied art in London, Paris, and New York before returning to British Columbia. He taught at the Vancouver School of Art from 1945 to 1966, becoming the head of the school's painting and drawing section. Major influences include Emily Carr and Aboriginal art of the Pacific Northwest.

Sonderborg, K.R.H. (German, 1923–2008)
An important figure in the Art Informel movement in Germany, whose work became increasingly abstract in the 1950s. Sonderborg's paintings and drawings frequently incorporate calligraphic forms and have been associated intellectually with the work of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky.

Spoerri, Daniel (Swiss, b. 1930)
An artist and entrepreneur born in Romania, Spoerri was a founder of Nouveau réalisme in 1960. His performance art was informed by his professional background in ballet, mime, theatre direction, and set design, and his found-object sculpture by the techniques of earlier Dada artists.

Still, Clyfford (American, 1904–1980)
A painter associated with Abstract Expressionism. Still spent part of his childhood on an Alberta farm, and prairie landscapes figure prominently in his early work. The natural environment continued to be a marked influence until the mid-1940s, when he moved to New York and his paintings became increasingly abstract.

Sullivan, Françoise (Canadian, b. 1923)
Born in Montreal, Sullivan—an artist, sculptor, dancer, and choreographer—studied at the city's École des beaux-arts (now part of the Université du Québec à Montréal) in the early 1940s, where she met Paul-Émile Borduas. His vision of automatism would become a great influence on her modern dance performances and choreography. (See *Françoise Sullivan: Life & Work* by Annie Gérin.)

Surrealism
An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris. Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Tachism
Along with Lyrical Abstraction and Art Informel, Tachism refers to an art movement of the 1950s considered the European counterpart of Abstract Expressionism. Strongest in France, it is also associated with Automatism (as practised by the Surrealists), for its emphasis on unplanned mark making, allowing imaginative expression to arise freely from the unconscious mind.

Tinguely, Jean (Swiss, 1925–1991)
A sculptor of kinetic, monumental, and self-destructing works, such as *Homage to New York*, 1960, which ignited outside of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Tinguely was one of the founders of Nouveau réalisme and produced many collaborative works over the course of his career.

trompe l'oeil
French for "deceives the eye," *trompe l'oeil* refers to visual illusion in art, especially images and painted objects that appear to exist in three dimensions and even aim to trick the viewer into thinking that they are real. Common examples are the painted insects that appear to sit on the surface of Renaissance paintings, and murals that make flat walls appear to open into spaces beyond.

Vaillancourt, Armand (Canadian, b. 1929)
An abstract sculptor and painter whose work is often informed by the political principle of anti-oppression. Vaillancourt's materials range from clay and wood to salvaged metal, bone, and concrete, and his creations often privilege the physical character of his chosen medium.

Weber, Max (American, 1881–1961)
A Russian-born painter, sculptor, printmaker, and writer, trained as an artist in Paris. Weber's early admiration and adoption of European modernist movements—including Fauvism and Cubism—made him one of the most significant artists of the American avant-garde.

Wols (German, 1913–1951)
A painter, photographer, illustrator, and poet who studied at the Bauhaus. Wols (the pseudonym of Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze) was active in Parisian Surrealist circles in the 1930s and helped establish Tachism and Art Informel, movements considered the European counterparts to American Abstract Expressionism.

Zaritsky, Joseph (Israeli, 1891–1985)
An important figure in the history of modernism in Israel, Zaritsky first became interested in abstraction in the 1940s. He co-founded and later led New Horizons, an artists' group active from around 1948 until 1963. He inspired many younger artists to break from the figurative expressionism that had dominated Israeli art.

SOURCES & RESOURCES

Critical acclaim for Borduas's considerable body of work has ensured that his significant role in the history of Canadian art is widely recognized. Internationally, Borduas's reputation was firmly established immediately after his death with a major exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, originally planned as a mid-career retrospective. The trajectory of Borduas's influence through his writings, first and foremost the *Refus global* manifesto, mirrors that of his recognition as a painter.



The second exhibition of the Automatistes, 1947, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West. *Left to right*: Marcel Barbeau, Pierre Gauvreau, Madeleine Arbour, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Claude Gauvreau.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Borduas's selected exhibition history is divided into two sections: exhibitions organized during his lifetime, and those since 1960.

Selected Exhibitions during Borduas's Lifetime

1941	Participates in *Première exposition des Indépendants*, Quebec City and Montreal.
1942	Participates in *L'exposition des maîtres de la peinture moderne*, Séminaire de Joliette. Organized by Father Wilfrid Corbeil. *Oeuvres surréalistes de Paul-Émile Borduas*, Ermitage, Montreal. Exhibition of forty-five gouaches.
1943	*Exhibition Borduas*, Dominion Gallery, Montreal.
1946	Participates in the first exhibition of the Automatistes, 1257 Amherst Street, Montreal. *Oeuvres de Paul-Émile Borduas*, gallery of Henry Morgan & Company, Montreal.
1947	Participates in the second exhibition of the Automatistes, 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal.

1948 & 49	Exhibits at the studio of the brothers Guy and Jacques Viau.
1949	Participates in *Quatre peintres du Québec*, Musée de la province de Québec, Quebec City.
1950	Participates in *Exposition des Rebelles*, 2035 Mansfield Street, Montreal. Exhibits watercolours at his studio in Saint-Hilaire, and again in 1951.
1954	*Paul-Émile Borduas*, Passedoit Gallery, New York. Exhibits watercolours here in 1955. *En route*, Galerie Agnès Lefort, Montreal.
1955	3rd Bienal de São Paulo. Represents Canada (with Jean-Paul Riopelle), at the Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo.
1955 1957 & 59	Biennial of Canadian Painting, organized by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Travelled to various Canadian cities. (The NGC organized seven biennials, beginning in 1955.)
1957	*Paul-Émile Borduas: Paintings, 1953–1956*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
1959	Participates in *Spontanéité et réflexion*, Galerie Arnaud, Paris. *An Intimate Showing of Recent Paintings by Paul Borduas*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. *Exhibition Paul-Émile Borduas*, Galerie Saint-Germain, Paris.



Jean-Paul Riopelle and Fernand Leduc at the exhibition *Automatisme* at the Galerie de Luxembourg, Paris, 1947.

Selected Exhibitions since 1960

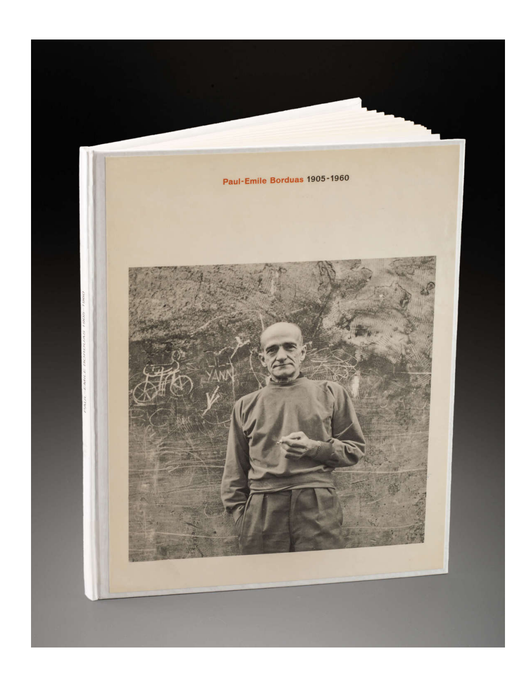
1960	*Borduas 1905–1960*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Catalogue.
1962	*Paul-Émile Borduas, 1905–1960*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Travelled to National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Art Gallery of Toronto. Catalogue. *La peinture canadienne moderne: 25 années de peinture au Canada-français*, 5th Festival of Two Worlds, Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto, Italy. Catalogue.
1968	*Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne. Travelled to Musée national d'art moderne, Paris; Galleria nazionale di arte moderna, Rome; Palais des beaux-arts, Brussels. Catalogue.
1971	*Borduas et les automatistes: Montréal, 1942–1955*, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris. Travelled to Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Catalogue.
1977	*Borduas and America / Borduas et l'Amérique*, Vancouver Art Gallery. Catalogue.

1979	*Frontiers of Our Dreams: Quebec Painting in the 1940s and 1950s*, Winnipeg Art Gallery. Catalogue.
1982 & 83	*Paul-Émile Borduas et la peinture abstraite: Oeuvres picturales de 1943 à 1960*, Palais des beaux-arts, Brussels. Travelled to Musée Saint-Georges, Liège, Belgium. Catalogue.
1988	*Paul-Émile Borduas*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Catalogue.
1992	*The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s / La crise de l'abstraction au Canada: Les années 1950*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Travelled to Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Glenbow Museum, Calgary; Art Gallery of Hamilton. Catalogue.
1997	*Saint-Hilaire et les Automatistes*, Musée d'art de Mont-Saint-Hilaire. Catalogue.
1998	*Refus global and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
1999	*La Collection Borduas du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Quebec City.
2004	*La magie des signes: Oeuvres sur papier de la Collection Borduas du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, Orangerie du Domaine de Madame Élisabeth, Versailles. Organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Catalogue.

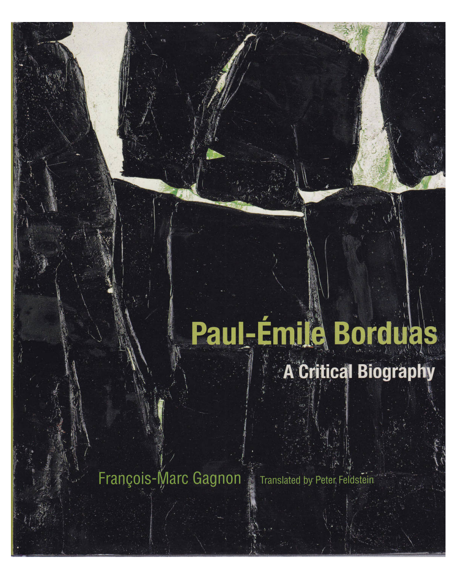
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The Paul-Émile Borduas catalogue raisonné, on the Concordia University website, contains many reproductions of his paintings, the literature written about them, and a list of exhibitions where they were shown. borduascatalog.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANÇOIS-MARC GAGNON

François-Marc Gagnon is the Founding Director and Distinguished Research Fellow of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art. Internationally recognized as an outstanding scholar of Canadian visual culture, Dr. Gagnon is a teacher, researcher, writer, lecturer, and a tireless promoter of the country's visual heritage. In 1999 he received the Order of Canada. He taught at the Université de Montréal for thirty-five years and was a lecturer in Concordia University's graduate Art History program. He has received many awards for his writing, including the Governor General's Award for his 1978 critical biography of Paul-Émile Borduas. This seminal work was published in English in 2013 as *Paul-Émile Borduas: A Critical Biography*; the text was updated and revised by the author and translated by Peter Feldstein.

Gagnon's other books include *La conversion par l'image: Un aspect de la mission des Jésuites auprès des Indiens du Canada au XVIIe siècle* (1975); *Paul-Émile Borduas: Ecrits/Writings, 1942–1958* (1978); *Paul-Émile Borduas* (1988), for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois, 1941–1954* (1998); and *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas* (2011). His numerous monograph studies span the history of Quebec art, from his book *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France* (1976) to recent writings on Jean-Paul Riopelle.

He has contributed to numerous books on Quebec visual culture and exhibition catalogues and has curated many exhibitions. He has regular contributed to *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* and is a member of its editorial board, among others. Dr. Gagnon reached the wider community through his television series *Introduction à la peinture moderne au Québec* for Canal Savoir, and more recently he has presented a series of annual lectures on aspects of Canadian art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in conjunction with the Jarislowsky Institute. He has served on various boards of museums and is regularly called upon as a consultant to art and academic institutions.



"For as long as I can remember, Borduas has been part of my life. Borduas and my father, Maurice Gagnon, both taught at the École du meuble, and during my childhood and teenage years we often visited Borduas in Saint-Hilaire. When I was asked to teach Canadian art at the Université de Montréal in the 1970s, Borduas became one of my heroes. I am still in awe of the quality of his painting."

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the Author

I am deeply grateful for the essential contributions made by everyone who assisted me in my research on Borduas. First and foremost I owe thanks to my wife, Pnina, who, every week for eleven years, drove me to Mme Borduas's home in Beloeil, where all of the Borduas documentation (letters, photographs, articles, etc.) was kept. It was not until the end of that long period that I was able to persuade Mme Borduas to allow the microfilming of the contents of the two filing cabinets left by Borduas at the time of his death. Later the cabinets themselves and all the original documents were given to the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, where they remain. I have also benefited from contact with several of the Automatistes who were close to Borduas: above all, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Marcel Barbeau, and Françoise Sullivan. Other colleagues—including André G. Bourassa, Gilles Lapointe, Ray Ellenwood, and Laurier Lacroix—have been unfailing sources of illumination in the course of my research. I must also thank my students in the Art History Department at the Université de Montréal, whose untiring efforts have allowed me to reconstruct a detailed record of the critical reception of Borduas's work; these assistants spent long sessions reading through microfilmed news sources (not yet digitized) in search of anything related to Borduas, from the briefest of notices announcing the date and time of an opening to more substantial reviews of his solo exhibitions or his contributions to group shows. The funding received from governmental sources was an invaluable support to the project. Little by little we amassed a precious trove of data and resource materials, which has now grown large enough to occupy an entire wall of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art at Concordia University. Thus, over the years, I have been able to devote myself to writing about Borduas: about his painting, which I have always seen as the most innovative in the entire history of Canadian art, and about his thought, which was deeply influential in the evolution of ideas in Quebec. I hope that readers of this publication by the Art Canada Institute will be inspired to learn more about Borduas's painting and his ideas.

From the Art Canada Institute

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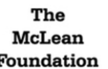
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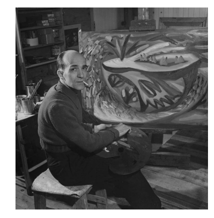
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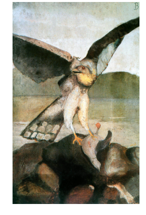


Paul-Émile Borduas, *Abstract in Blue*, 1959. (See below for details.)

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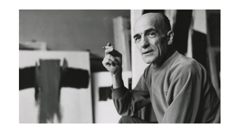
Biography: Paul-Émile Borduas, photographed by Ronny Jacques. Photo courtesy of Library and Archives Canada / Ronny Jacques.



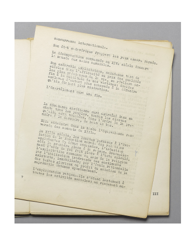
Key Works: Paul-Émile Borduas, *Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape*, c. 1923–24. (See below for details.)



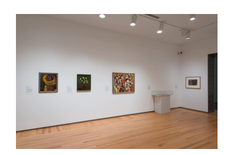
Significance & Critical Issues: Borduas explaining *Study for Torso* or *No. 14*, 1942, to Henri Girard and Charles Doyon at the opening of the exhibition at the Ermitage in April–May 1942. (See below for details.)



Style & Technique: Paul-Émile Borduas in Paris, c. 1955. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: *Refus global* manifesto. (See below for details.)



Where to See: Borduas's *Figure with Birds*, 1953, on display at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario. Photo © Sam Koebrich.

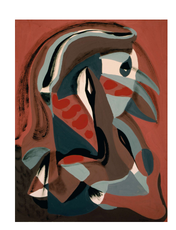
Credits for Work by Paul-Émile Borduas



Abstract in Blue, 1959. Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Sam and Ayala Zacks, Toronto, 1961. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © AGO.



The Black Star, 1957. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gérard Lortie. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



Chanteclerc or *No. 6*, 1942. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo:
Richard-Max Tremblay.



Composition (detail), 1942. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



Composition 69, 1960. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Renée Borduas. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



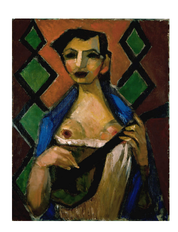
Decorative Project for the Chapel of a Château, No. 4: Study for Stained Glass Window, 1927. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of Mme Paul-Émile Borduas, Beloeil, Quebec, 1974. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



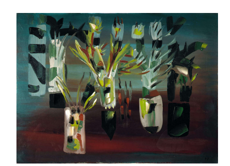
Eagle with White Family. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



Épanouissement [Blossoming], 1956. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



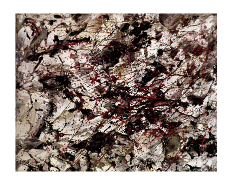
Femme à la mandolin [Woman with a Mandolin], 1941. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



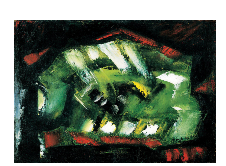
Flowered Quivers or *8.47*, 1947. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Chartré. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



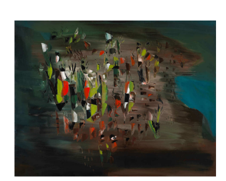
Forgotten Forms, 1958. Firestone Collection of Canadian Art, The Ottawa Art Gallery, donated to the City of Ottawa by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © Tim Wickens.



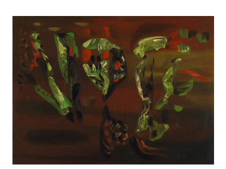
Graffiti, 1954. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



Green Abstraction, 1941. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, grant from the Government of Canada under the terms of the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, and Harry W. Thorpe Bequest. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



Leeward of the Island (1.47), 1947. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1953. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



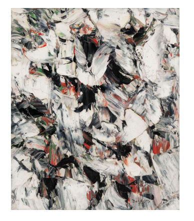
Nature's Parachutes (19.47), 1947. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1948. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



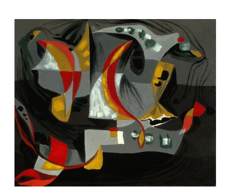
The Nun, 1951. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



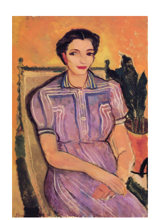
Pâques [Easter], 1954. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, gift of National Museums of Canada. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



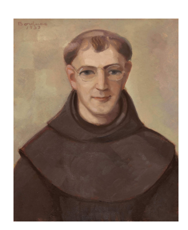
Persistence of Blacks, 1955. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © Heffel.com.



The Phantom Boat, 1942, Université de Montréal. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © Centre d'exposition de l'Université de Montréal.



Gabrielle Borduas, 1940. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, anonymous gift (1988.9). © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



Reverend Father Carmel Brouillard, O.F.M., 1937. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of Mollie Gordon, Staines, England, 1973. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014), Photo © NGC.



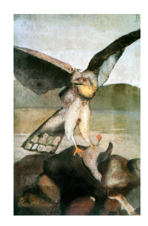
The Signs Take Flight, 1953. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' Volunteer Association Fund. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



Still-life (Pineapples and Pears), 1941. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1973. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



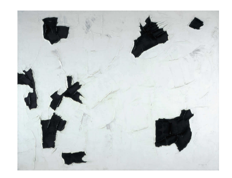
Study for Torso or *No. 14*, 1942. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014)



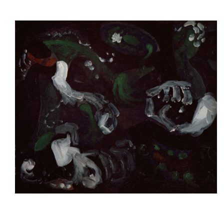
Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape, c. 1923–24. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).



Symphony on a White Checkerboard or *Symphony 2*, 1957. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Brigadier-General A. Hamilton Gault Bequest. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



3+4+1, 1956. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1962. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



Viol aux confins de la matière [Rape at the Limits of Matter], 1943. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014). Photo: MACM.



The West Wind Brings Porcelain Chinoiseries, 1950. Private collection. © Estate of Paul-Émile Borduas / SODRAC (2014).

Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



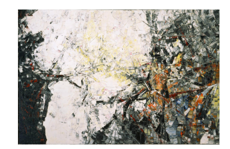
After losing his position at the École du meuble in Montreal, Borduas taught drawing to children in Saint-Hilaire. The interior of Borduas's home. Photograph by Maurice Perron. Archives of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © Maurice Perron Estate. Photo:
Richard-Max Tremblay.



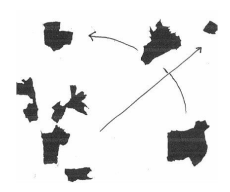
Andre Breton, c. 1929. Photographer unknown.



The atelier of the École des beaux-arts de Montréal (c. 1924). Collection Bibliothèque des Arts, UQAM.



Austria III, 1954, by Jean-Paul Riopelle. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequest. © Estate of Jean Paul Riopelle / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



The author's diagram of *3+4+1*. Courtesy of François-Marc Gagnon.



Borduas explaining *Study for Torso* or *No. 14*, 1942, to Henri Girard and Charles Doyon at the opening of the exhibition at the Ermitage in April–May 1942. Archives of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



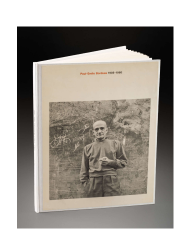
Borduas in his bedroom at the convent of Saints-Noms-de-Jésus-et-de-Marie, with *Study of a Sparrow Hawk in a Decorative Landscape*, around 1924. Archives of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



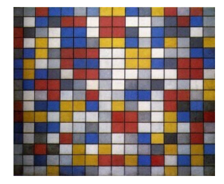
Borduas seated beneath his iconic painting *Leeward of the Island*, surrounded by members of the Automatistes. Photograph by Maurice Perron. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, gift of the family of Maurice Perron. © Maurice Perron Estate. Photo © MNBAQ.



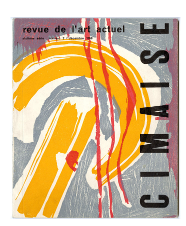
Borduas teaching at the École du meuble, c. 1942. Photographer unknown.



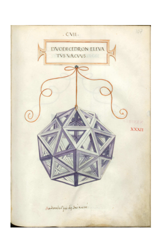
The catalogue of the 1962 Borduas exhibit organized by the National Gallery of Canada, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the Art Gallery of Toronto. Photo courtesy of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Library.



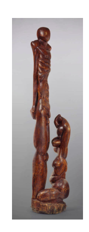
Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colours, 1919, by Piet Mondrian. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands. © 2014 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International USA. Digital Image © Haags Gemeentemuseum / The Bridgeman Art Library.



The December 1958 issue of the Parisian art journal *Cimaise*. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Elevated Dodecahedron with Open Faces, drawing attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, from *The Divine Proportion* by Luca Pacioli (1509). Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, Italy / De Agostini Picture Library / © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana - Milano / The Bridgeman Art Library.



The Family, 1949, by Robert Roussil. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Bernard Janelle. Photo © MMFA.



The first Automatiste exhibition, in a makeshift gallery at 1257 Amherst Street, ran April 20–29, 1946. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, gift of the family of Maurice Perron. © Maurice Perron Estate. Photo © MNBAQ.



Frontispiece for André Breton's "Le chateau étoilé" (1936), by Max Ernst. Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Fund. © Estate of Max Ernst / SODRAC (2014). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



Girl with Mandolin, 1860–65, by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. Saint Louis Art Museum, Accession Number: 3:1939.



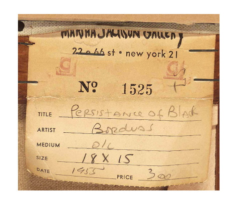
In the early 1940s the Automatistes would meet in the studio of Fernand Leduc. Paul-Émile Borduas Fonds of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



Jackson Pollock working on his painting *Autumn Rhythm*, 1951. Photograph by Hans Namuth. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution / Art Resource, NY. © Hans Namuth Ltd.



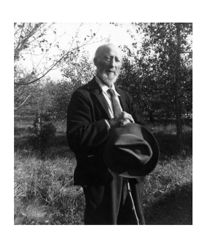
Jean-Paul Riopelle and Fernand Leduc at the exhibition *Automatisme* at the Galerie de Luxembourg, Paris, 1947. Archives of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay.



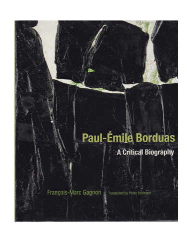
A label on the verso of *Persistence of Blacks* from the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. Photo © Heffel.com.



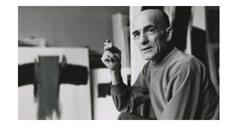
The Liberal Party slogan "C'est l'temps qu'ça change" (It's time things changed) was a hallmark of Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Photographer unknown.



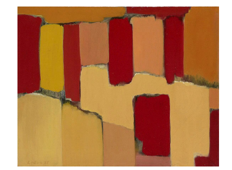
Ozias Leduc at his home in Saint-Hilaire, 1954. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of NGC.



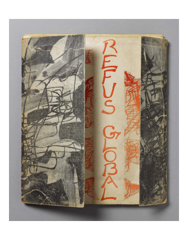
Paul-Émile Borduas: A Critical Biography, by François-Marc Gagnon. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).



Paul-Émile Borduas in Paris, c. 1955. Photographer unknown. Photo courtesy of MCAM.



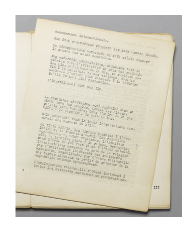
Red Doors, 1955, by Fernand Leduc. Musée national des beaux arts du Québec (promised gift of the artist). © Estate of Fernand Leduc / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MNBAQ.



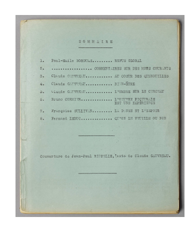
Refus global manifesto. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



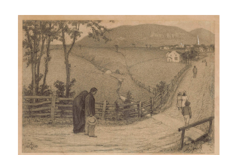
Refus global manifesto, centrefold. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Refus global manifesto, interior page. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Refus global manifesto, table of contents. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Road to the Church (Saint-Hilaire), 1899, by Ozias Leduc. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. © Estate of Ozias Leduc / SODRAC (2014). Photo © NGC.



The second exhibition of the Automatistes, 1947, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West. Maurice Perron Fonds, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. © Maurice Perron Estate. Photo © MNBAQ



Students gather for a demonstration in Hans Hofmann's studio in Provincetown, Massachusetts, date unknown. Photo courtesy of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



The Three Apples, 1887, by Ozias Leduc. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Harriette J. MacDonnell, William Gilman Cheney, Dr. Francis J. Shepherd and Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequests. © Estate of Ozias Leduc / SODRAC (2014). Photo © MMFA.



Turin, 1960, by Franz Kline. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, Gift of Mrs. Alfred B. Clark through Friends of Art.

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